

# **THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE AND GENDER ON THE CREDIBILITY OF POSITIVE ONLINE REVIEWS**

AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON READER PERCEPTIONS IN A  
REVIEW-BASED CONTEXT ON TRIPADVISOR

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

It is an undeniable fact that the Internet has grown tremendously, and with it, its influence on our daily lives. We have formed online communities, which allow us to communicate our thoughts to a large audience without restrictions, including feedback on goods and services that we use before making important purchase decisions (Huang & Yang, 2008). This type of word-of-mouth via the Internet, also known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), has already been proven more effective than marketer-provided information (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). It includes blogposts, discussion forums, online reviews, etc. and has grown to have an important economic impact (Vásquez, 2014). Therefore, eWOM has become a valuable subject to study and both producers and consumers can benefit from the information it provides (Li & Zahn, 2011). This study will focus on online reviews specifically, as they are the most common form of eWOM (Bickart & Schindler, 2005).

The interesting fact about reviews is that they are no longer exclusively written by experts as everyone has become a critic on the Internet (Huang & Yang, 2008). Researchers have therefore noticed that verifying the credibility and trustworthiness of online reviews and their authors has become a prominent concern of many Internet users (Bickart & Schindler, 2005; Vásquez, 2014). An intrinsic quality of online reviews is their persuasiveness and this is entirely dependent on their perceived credibility (Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013). We have therefore decided to focus on review credibility among other perceptions such as source intelligence and professionalism with aspects of language as variables we wish to manipulate.

In doing so, we pick up on previous studies that have already discussed a possible effect of non-standard language on perceived credibility (Jansen, 2010; Kloet, Renkema and van Wijk, 2010; Kreiner, Schnakenberg, Green, Costello and McClin, 2012; Maesschalck, 2015; Schloneger, 2016; van Wijngaarden, 2011). More specifically, we want to travel along the investigative trail that was initiated by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) on the specific context of online reviews. In their research, they examined the impact of language mistakes and non-standard language on customer outcomes in very negative reviews. We, however, want to examine to what extent the same effects can be attested in positive reviews. There are two reasons for this. First, the results showed that the overall credibility of the review was very low (even in standard language scenarios) due to the very negative nature of the review. We want to examine to what

extent the same effects can be observed in a review that might have different ratings to begin with. Secondly, since the reviewer in their experiment may have been sanctioned more severely for deviating from expected norms in a contexts where he/she is critically assessing others' services, this effect may less pervasive in positive reviews.

In addition, Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) registered a surprising influence of gender in standard language scenarios on the perceptions of the review and reviewer. Their data implied that the male reviewer scored better on credibility and reliability and the review written by the male reviewer was perceived as qualitative and more useful. The female reviewer seemed to be criticised more for her use of non-standard language in comparison to the male reviewer. Female respondents, too, scored the male reviewer better. In this paper, we want to examine whether similar results can be attested in positive reviews.

In sum, this Master paper will focus on the effect of non-standard language and gender on the perceptions of positive online reviews. We have centred our methodology on the papers of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) to investigate the influence of positivity versus negativity. Specifically, we will try to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent does the presence of non-standard language influence the perceptions of both the review and reviewer in positive review contexts?
- To what extent does the gender of the reviewer affect the perceptions of the review and reviewer in positive review contexts?

To stay true to the study of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) we also made a distinction between two types of non-standard language: language errors and "*tussentaal*" (a vernacular between standard Dutch and Dutch dialects, see 2.2.4).

- Do language errors and *tussentaal* exert different effects on the perception of positive reviews and their author?

The following sections of this thesis are structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the literature in which we will cover electronic word-of-mouth and, more specifically, online reviews. Next, we will provide you with more information on online credibility and how this is influenced by non-standard language and *tussentaal*. We will also elaborate on *tussentaal* itself and Flemings' attitudes towards it. We will conclude Section 2 with a synthesis of the literature on gender and credibility and a set of hypotheses. In Section 3, we will elaborate on our methodology and go into detail regarding our scenarios, our language manipulations and the constructs and questions used in the survey. Section 4 contains the data analysis and our results, from which we will draw conclusions in the final section of this paper.



## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and online reviews

The concept of word-of-mouth or WOM, can be defined as “the exchange of information about goods and services among consumers” (Bickart & Schindler, 2012, p.234). The effect of this free advertising should not be underestimated. Harrison and Walker (2001) have shown that we tend to believe our peers over salespeople, because WOM appears to be nothing more than a shared opinion instead of an intent to control the consumer (Arndt, 1967). This trust in WOM causes a decline in the company’s power to manipulate their customers through traditional approaches (Jalilvand, Esfahani & Samei, 2011), especially in online contexts via e-WOM. Even though word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth are quite similar conceptually (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004), there are major differences in practice. WOM is usually spoken and only has an effect on a small scale for a limited amount of time (Vásquez, 2014). Both parties normally share a strong relationship (Bickart & Schindler, 2005). eWOM, however, is usually written and can be spread quickly on a large scale (Vásquez, 2014). It remains accessible for an unlimited period to an extensive public and both parties may remain anonymous (Vásquez, 2014). These features are expected to generate a greater impact on a bigger public and have made eWOM a much-researched topic (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Additionally, Bickart and Schindler (2005) suggested that there is a positive correlation between the Internet and the role of eWOM. They mentioned that the easier the access to and usage of the Internet gets, the bigger impact eWOM will have. Yet the Internet is not the only reason for eWOM’s popularity. The basic human need for interaction, our interest in money and our concern for fellow consumers are what compel people to turn to eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

As eWOM can take many forms on various platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), Bickart and Schindler (2005) decided to subdivide the concept into seven different components: posted reviews, mailbags, discussion forums, electronic mailing lists, personal mail, chatrooms and instant messaging. Their subdivision is just one example of the possible types of eWOM. For example, Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) classify all possible forms (including websites) by using two axes: communication scope and level of interactivity (see Figure 1). This tool demonstrates that online reviews are asynchronous texts, meaning that the author and reader

are not required to access the text at the same time. On the axe of communication scope, online reviews are closest to ‘one-to-many’.

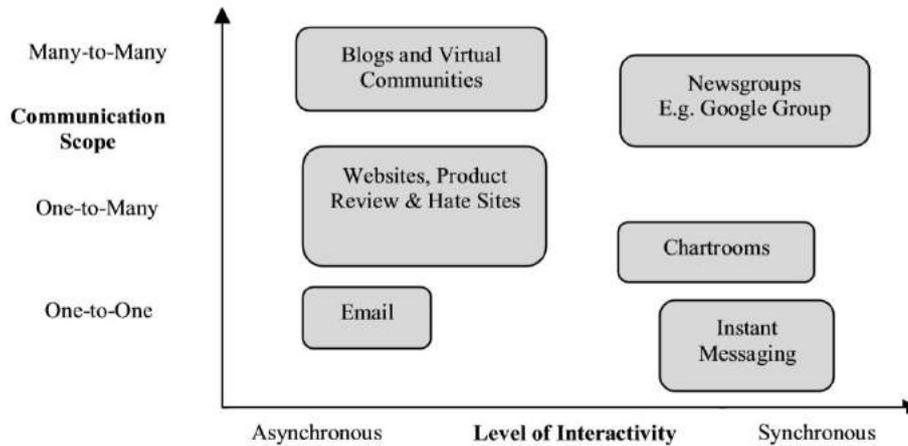


Figure 1 A typology of eWOM forms (Litvin et al., 2008)

In view of the impact they may have and the fact that they are the most used form of e-WOM (Bickart & Schindler, 2005), we will single out online reviews as the subject of study.

### 2.1.1 Why people write and read reviews

Now that we have established the typology of eWOM, it is important to also consider the intentions of authors and readers. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) investigated the possible motives people have to disperse positive or negative information about a company or product. Summarising prior research by Dichter (1966), Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1993) and Sundaram, Mitra and Webster (1998), they found four motives for spreading positive WOM and four for negative WOM. The first reason for both positive and negative WOM is referred to as ‘concern for other consumers’ and is covered by the umbrella term altruism. Product involvement, self-enhancement and helping the company are the other three motives for spreading positive WOM. The remaining three motives to distribute negative WOM include anxiety reduction, vengeance and advice seeking. When referring to the more specific context of online reviews, Gretzel and Yoo (2008) found seven motives to spread eWOM: enjoyment, exertion of collective power over companies, venting negative feelings, concerns for other consumers, helping the company, expressing positive feelings and self-enhancement.

Expressing positive feelings is used the most, while venting negative feelings is not a common motive (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008), perhaps against expectations. It is also important to point out that these motives differ depending on the gender of the reviewer: women mostly write to help the company and express positive feelings, while men are more likely to write to vent negative feelings out of concern for other customers (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). For our research, we opted for a positive review of a restaurant, which can be considered a form of expressing positive feelings, altruism and helping the company.

Gaining insight to why people consult reviews is as valuable as establishing why a review was written. Bickart and Schindler (2005) listed various reasons of why people go looking for extra information in the form of an online review. Firstly, they discussed the most obvious motive: seeking information. People decide to read reviews when they require specific information, when they consider the matter of high importance and when there is no input available from family or friends (Bickart & Schindler, 2005). The second main motive is when people go looking for support and community. Bickart and Schindler (2005) also found most Internet users look for validation of what they already think when reading online reviews. Lastly, people look for amusing stories when reading reviews. In other words, they use eWOM as entertainment, while subconsciously learning more about the product or service provided by the company.

Most review readers are preoccupied by two primary concerns, specifically the questionable authenticity of the author and whether the review merits the time taken to read it. Even though people tend to attribute more credibility to eWOM than to marketer-generated content (Bickart & Schindler, 2001), this type of user generated content (UGC) comes along with a lot of uncertainty about the sender as well (Ayeh, et al., 2013). This study is directed towards the first concern: reader perceptions regarding the review and reviewer in terms of credibility and other customer outcomes (consumer intention, source intelligence, text clarity, etc.). We will assess the effect of both the language use and gender on the way the review and the reviewer will be perceived.

## 2.2 Online credibility

While researchers have proven eWOM to be a very influential source of information (Bickart & Schindler, 2001), it may lose this power when readers question its validity (Ayeh et al., 2013). In other words, eWOM's influence is determined by its credibility. Various researchers have investigated how Internet users evaluate the level of credibility of online information. Through focus groups, Metzger, Flanagin and Medders (2010) found that their participants use both their offline and their online social networks to verify information they found online. From these interviews, four ways of verifying online information were constructed. The first type is social information pooling by consulting reviews. Here they noted that quantity is positively related to review credibility and, remarkably, that a small number of reviews must be negative in order to remain credible. In general, the participants were more inclined to believe reviews than the "biased" (p. 421) information they found on the company's website, see also Harrison and Walker (2001) for similar results. The second validating tool is the social confirmation of personal opinions. According to Metzger et al.'s participants, online users look for opinions similar to their own. Information that matches your prior thoughts will appear more credible, even more so when the author is similar in terms of socio-economic profile to the reader (see 2.2.3). Some participants even claimed to stop their search for information once they have found something that matches their beliefs, which was also mentioned by Bickart and Schindler (2005). Thirdly, Metzger et al. (2010) claim that online users search for devoted customers' opinions and verify their expertise on the topic through "indicators such as topic mastery, writing style, spelling and grammar, and the extent of details offered [...]" (p.424). Lastly, people share the information they found online to verify its credibility by people they personally know.

These methods provided Metzger et al. (2010) with the necessary information to establish five heuristics Internet users have developed to evaluate the credibility of the online source: reputation, endorsement, consistency, expectancy violation and persuasive intent. Because it costs us less cognitive effort, we tend to prefer what we recognise, meaning that names with a big reputation are more easily believed. Receiving a positive endorsement by other people, (either by a social group or a review) is also positively related to credibility. This is also known as the "bandwagon heuristic" (p. 428): when others believe something to be true, it instantly becomes more credible. Internet users also check other sources to see if there is consistency in

the information they find.: if so, the information becomes more credible. Linked to the second validating tool listed in this research (social confirmation of personal opinions), information found online loses some of its credibility when it goes against the reader's prior notions. Lastly, the persuasive intent heuristic indicated that people protect themselves from commercial information. In other words, if the readers suspects the author to have ulterior motives, they become less credible.

Next to those five heuristics, other researchers have also identified review characteristics that contribute to the credibility of both the review and the reviewer. It has been suggested, for example, that readers look for bias in reviews by verifying if the author is linked to the company or when the review sounds too positive or even forced (Bickart & Schindler, 2005). Bickart and Schindler (2005) point out that using 'I' and talking about personal experiences are perceived as positive for the author's credibility. They also investigated which cues readers look for in order to decide how valid they deem the review. Here readers value details and to be more precise, details from personal experiences. Readers also look for multiple reviews that share the same opinion (Bickart & Schindler, 2005; Man-Yee, Choon-Ling and Kuan, 2012) and pay close attention to the wording of the review (Bickart & Schindler, 2005). According to Man-Yee et al. (2012) the most important element for review credibility is argument quality. However, many studies have pointed out the importance of the reviewer's own information (Bickart & Schindler, 2005; Man-Yee et al., 2012; Xu, 2014). Including a profile picture can already significantly advance the trust of the reader in the reviewer (Xu, 2014). Even the positivity of the review plays a part in its perceived credibility, as Kusumasondjaja, Shanka and Marchegiani (2012) suggested negative reviews appear more credible.

In this particular paper, we want to focus on three aspects that may affect credibility. One is concerned with internal features of the review itself, i.e. the impact of spelling and grammar that was referred to in Metzger et al. (2010). The second feature we wish to focus on singles out an external, say, contextual feature, i.e. the gender of the reviewer. The last aspect we will consider is the positivity of the review as this could also play a part in the perceptions of the reader (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). In the next section, we will first focus on the possible impact of negativity on credibility perceptions. We will then discuss aspects of online language and zoom in on research that reports on the effect of language features on credibility. These results will be complemented with insight from research in which gender and credibility

received focal attention. Note that the other aspects that have been reported on as having an impact on credibility will be kept stable as much as possible in the experimental set-up. See Section 3 for a more elaborate account of methodological aspects.

### 2.2.1 Negative vs positive reviews and credibility

A study conducted by Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2010) concentrated on negativity versus positivity. Although their research did not focus on the context of reviews specifically, their findings do appear interesting for this study as they claim that bad feedback affects us more than positive feedback. It supposedly takes us longer to process negative information and therefore we examine it in more detail. Baumeister et al. (2010) explain this by looking at human instinct: we pay more attention to and look out for bad things, as they can cause danger and potentially death. They also found that our brains have more intense reactions to negative events and we therefore remember negative memories longer.

In reviews, negativity seems to attract more attention than positivity (Vásquez, 2012; Schindler & Bickart, 2005) but linking negativity in reviews to credibility has not yet been studied extensively. Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) did suggest that negative reviews appear to be more credible than positive ones, and even more so when they include information of the reviewer. Positive reviews with reviewer information, however, are thought to influence initial trust the strongest (Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012). In addition, participants in a study by Metzger et al. (2010) indicated that they found negative reviews more credible as they appeared to be more honest. However, other participants in the same research who found negative reviews biased countered this. Some even suspected authors of negative reviews to be vindictive. Li and Zahn (2011) found most readers prefer reviews that are not too negative, while strong positivity is not disliked. It has also been suggested that readers find positive reviews more helpful (Sen and Lerman, 2007) and that the author's enthusiasm can be transferred onto the reader (Bickart and Schindler, 2001).

In sum, negativity seems to attract more attention in general (Baumeister et al., 2010) and various studies confirm this effect in reviews as well (Vásquez, 2012; Bickart & Schindler, 2005). However, a negative review may also appear suspicious (Metzger et al., 2010). The

extreme negative review used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) obtained low scores on constructs such as credibility, professionalism and reliability across all scenarios. This is in line with findings of Lee and Zahn (2011), who also suggest extreme positivity would not be as harmful. We are therefore prone to believe our positive scenario will score higher on the same constructs used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018).

**H1: A positive online review will be better perceived than its negative counterpart.**

### 2.2.2 Online reviews and language

Different types of online texts and their language features have already been studied but, as De Decker (2014) remarked, a clear distinction cannot be made. Language used on Twitter, in text messages, blogposts, emails, online reviews, etc. can all be labelled Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) but differences can be found both within as between the genres (De Decker, 2014). Within this large concept of CMC, De Decker (2014) talks of chatspeak as a subdivision. With its conversational tone and spoken language features, chatspeak distinguishes itself from CMC that is written according to classic writing customs (De Decker, 2014). Androutsopoulos (2011), however, considers all CMC to have both spoken and written language features and discussed three common aspect all CMC shares: orality, compensation and economy. Firstly, language used in online written contexts frequently contains spoken language features. Secondly, Adroutsopoulos (2011) mentioned the intent to compensate for lost face-to-face aspects in written communication. De Decker (2014) also touched on this characteristic in his discussion of chatspeak, including onomatopoeia and flooding (lengthening words e.g. neveeeer) as examples. Thirdly, users of CMC strive to economize their messages by abbreviating or simply leaving out words (Androutsopoulos, 2011; De Decker, 2014).

This adjusted form of language, adapted to an online context, has changed vernaculars as well. As Androutsopoulos (2011) explains:

The expansion of digital literacy practices affords vernacular written usage more space, visibility and status than ever before, and vernacular usage itself is diversified in what we might call ‘old vernaculars’, representing locally bound ways of speaking that traditionally didn’t find their way into (public) writing, and ‘new vernaculars’ – new

patterns of differentiation from written standards, indexing practices and networks of digital culture. (p.2)

Old vernacular writing entails dialects and other local varieties of the standard language, which were initially not included in public writing but have become increasingly visible through the new written media channels (Androutsopoulos, 2011). For example, “niet” (not) becomes “ni”. New vernaculars did not originate from local dialects but rather from the new digital writing conventions (Androutsopoulos, 2011). Some examples of this are “tbh” instead of “to be honest” and “idk” instead of “I do not know”. A commonly used Dutch new vernacular is “sws” instead of “sowieso” (certainly, in any case). The distinction between old and new vernaculars developed through two CMC conventions, namely to write as you speak and to write as quickly as possible (De Decker, 2014). The first convention resulted into old vernaculars and new vernaculars derived from the second convention. Some vernaculars, however, could belong to both new and old as, for example, da’ instead of ‘dat’ (that) is a widely used speaking convention and an abbreviation. In this study, we will mainly focus on old vernaculars and their effect on the perceptions of reviews and reviewers.

### 2.2.3 Language errors and credibility

Writing correctly is believed to be an important factor for the perceived credibility of both the text and the author (Kloet et al., 2003). Kloet et al. (2003) examined whether this self-evident connection between spelling abilities and credibility is as strong as presumed. First, we must indicate that they made a distinction between credibility and persuasiveness, which we chose not to make as a review’s persuasiveness is dependent of its perceived credibility (Ayeh et al., 2013). Kloet et al. (2003) analysed the effect of spelling errors, linking word errors and the combination of both. The study shows that when texts included linking word errors, they became more difficult to understand, but the author did not lose credibility. The texts with linking word errors and the texts with both linking word errors and spelling errors were perceived more difficult to comprehend than the texts without errors or the texts with spelling errors. The author of the correct text did obtain a slightly higher score on expertise than the authors of the other texts, but this was only the case for one specific type of document (a fundraising letter) and the effect was minimal. Kloet et al. (2003) also pointed out that linking word errors have a larger effect than spelling errors. Younger men regarded the writer of the

correct text as most reliable and the person who wrote the text with both types of errors as least reliable. This effect was not seen in young women's responses. In general, they concluded that linking word errors do affect the clarity of the text but do not influence its persuasiveness. Additionally, they suggest that linking word errors do not exert an effect on the author's credibility, although they did find a minimal impact on the perceived expertise of the writer. In other words, they do not believe language errors influence the author's image to a significant extent.

However, a study conducted by Kreiner et al. (2012) does indicate that the presence of many spelling errors can negatively alter the reader's perception of the author. Their study examined the effect of four spelling errors in an essay of about three hundred words and the effect of twelve spelling errors in that same essay. They found that there was no real impact in the four errors scenario, but the essay with twelve mistakes did affect the author's image. In other words, the density of language errors has an impact, which is also supported by Schloneger (2016). Although the participants scored the writer with twelve spelling errors low in writing ability, they did not link this to their cognitive ability. Spelling errors could simply be typos and are therefore not automatically perceived as a sign of a lack of intelligence, but look more like carelessness. In conclusion, Kreiner et al. (2012) suggest that a larger number of spelling errors only affects the author's perceived writing ability and not their perceived intelligence.

Studies by Jansen (2010), Schloneger (2016) and van Wijngaarden (2011), however, indicated a stronger impact of language errors than Kloet et al. (2003) and Kreiner et al. (2012). Their results suggest a negative effect of spelling errors on the author's image and the persuasiveness of the text. Jansen (2010) argues that the errors used in Kloet et al. (2003) resembled typos too much as only one error of each type occurred per letter. Therefore, it appears the writer did know how to spell and only faced some slip-ups. However, the linking word errors in Kloet et al.'s research did slightly affect the reader's opinion of the text. Jansen (2010) explains this effect because these errors were more striking, as they changed the meaning of the sentence and indicated the writer's cognitive disability.

Additionally, Kreiner et al. (2012) tested if the nature of the spelling errors altered the participants' perception of the author and text. They made a distinction between two types of spelling errors: phonological and typographical. Phonological errors are words that are spelled

incorrectly but can still be pronounced properly (e.g. nife instead of knife). Typographical errors make the word unpronounceable and appear to be mere slip-ups (e.g. geomertey instead of geometry). In their results, there was no distinction between the effect of phonological or typographical errors and both scored equally harmful for the author's perceived spelling ability.

There is no clear consensus on the effect of language errors on credibility perceptions. Both Kloet et al. (2003) and Kreiner et al. (2012) failed to register any substantial effect on reviewer credibility, while van Wijngaarden (2011), Jansen (2010) and Schloneger (2016) all suggest language errors do affect both text and author. However, we should take into account that the abovementioned studies did not focus on online reviews.

In the context of online reviews, researchers have found a negative influence of non-standard language on the perceived credibility of the reviewer (Depovere, 2018; Loete, 2018; Maesschalck, 2015). Maesschalck (2015) focussed on the effect of spelling errors in a review context and showed a negative influence of these errors on the credibility of the reviewer. Moreover, the results show that spelling errors do not only affect the review and the reviewer negatively, they lower the purchase intentions of the reader as well. Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) also registered a negative relation between language errors and review credibility. Specifically, their data suggests that spelling and grammatical errors negatively affect the perceived credibility, clarity, text quality and usefulness of the review. Additionally, the reviewer that used language errors was perceived as less intelligent and less professional.

Picking up on these studies, we opted for three errors in a text of one hundred and four words, which equals a density of 0.03%. This should be high enough to evoke some effect as Kreiner et al. (2012) pointed out 0.04% error density affects the author's image while 0,01% does not. We opted for both spelling errors and grammatical errors to include different types of language errors. Moreover, Depovere (2018), Loete (2018) and Maeschalck (2015) indicated that language errors exert a negative effect on the perceptions of both the text and the author in an online review context. However, we should mention that Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) used an extremely negative review in their study. Therefore, there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding our second hypothesis, as we cannot predict what the effect of language errors will be in an extremely positive online review. However, considering the results of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) we can hypothesize that we will register an effect caused by language errors.

## **H2: Language errors will have an impact on the way a positive review and the reviewer will be perceived.**

### 2.2.4 *Tussentaal* and credibility

*Tussentaal*, or ‘in-between-language’ is a substandard variety developed from the Dutch language and is situated somewhere in between standard Dutch and dialect (Taaltelefoon.be). It is a complex concept to define, as it varies depending on region, the speaker’s social identity and personal style (Jaspers, 2001). However, there are some general characteristics used throughout Flanders which were classified by Lybaert and Delarue (2017). Some of these include morphosyntactic features (e.g. *een* becomes *nen*, *die* becomes *dienen*), lexical changes and pronunciation adjustments (e.g. t-deletion: *niet* becomes *nie*). As mentioned in 2.1.2, the Internet has influenced how we use and perceive vernaculars such as *tussentaal*. The old vernaculars have changed the way we write online (Androutsopoulos, 2011), especially in chatspeak (De Decker, 2014). T-deletions and the inflection of articles, pronouns and adjectives can be seen in many online contexts, even though it has been proven to be harmful for the author’s perceived credibility and professionalism (De Decker & Lybaert, 2017). To be able to fully grasp how *tussentaal* influences the perception of both text and author, it is crucial to understand the history of language in Flanders as it has long been a sensitive issue. Lybaert (2014) mapped the current situation of *tussentaal* in Flanders and discussed its history. We will briefly disclose her findings in the paragraph below to contextualise different attitudes towards *tussentaal* and changes in them.

Initially, many saw *tussentaal* as a threat to standard Dutch and using this substandard variety was equal to a loss of prestige. This sceptical attitude towards any variation of standard Dutch can be explained through Belgium’s history. The region long faced domination from other rulers such as France and Spain, causing French to be the dominant language when Belgium became independent in 1830. Many Flemings and language experts long fought for the recognition of Dutch as one of the nation’s official languages. This eventually led to the northern variant (which had been able to develop in The Netherlands) to be adopted in Flanders, but because standard Dutch was imposed upon the Flemish society it was never fully accepted. Meanwhile, Flemish dialects had been able to develop and Lybaert (2014) has divided them

into four groups: West-Flemish, East-Flemish, Brabant and Limburgian. Unfortunately, because of the growing interactive society, it has become necessary to be understandable to Flemings of all regions and dialects have started to perish. When people tried to soften their dialectic language and speak standard Dutch, an initial form of *tussentaal* was created. This was originally considered as a transitional period when Flemings were still unable to speak standard Dutch, but it has now become a more commonly used variety than expected (Jaspers, 2001). Jaspers (2001) advocates that languages that originate through this type of process should be seen as “an answer to the increase in economic scale” (p. 136).

This history of standard Dutch and *tussentaal* in Flanders provides us with some context for how they are perceived by Flemings today. As this study also focusses on the effect of *tussentaal* in online reviews, it is crucial to fully understand people’s attitudes towards both varieties. People need conventions to define what is normal in which situation and because language is a part of social interaction, it is subject to our values (Jaspers, 2001). Both language and language conventions constantly influence each other and keep each other in a state of flux (Jaspers, 2001). These language conventions and our attitudes towards certain varieties of language might also influence an author’s perceived credibility. Therefore, we will now discuss attitudes towards standard Dutch, dialects and *tussentaal*.

As mentioned above, many language experts have tried to add prestige to standard Dutch and differentiate it from all varieties that might threaten its status. How this has affected the actual attitudes Flemings have towards *tussentaal* and dialects was questioned by Lybaert (2014). She suggests that Flemings have clear attitudes towards dialects and standard Dutch: dialects are tolerated in informal situations and standard Dutch is preserved for very formal circumstances. Lybaert (2014) noted that *tussentaal* is somewhere in between these two extremes as some Flemings consider it suitable in informal situations and others think it fitting in formal ones as well. Some even say it is applicable in every occasion, except for extremely formal ones. In conclusion, what Lybaert (2014) found was that Flemings adjust their attitude towards the use of language according to the context. Even though standard Dutch boasts much more prestige, Flemings hardly ever use it. While *tussentaal* might have certain stigma surrounding it, it is more commonly used in everyday life (Grondelaers & Lybaert, 2017). Furthermore, *tussentaal* benefits from a different type of prestige than standard Dutch: a “dynamic prestige” (Grondelaers & Lybaert, 2017, p.178), hence its popularity with the educated youth of Flanders.

Additionally, De Clerck and Lybaert (2017) argue that it is no longer clear to Flemings what correct standard Dutch entails as *tussentaal* has become such a ubiquitous phenomenon in Flanders. Lybaert (2014) also suggests Flemings are not always able to recognise *tussentaal* as such when presented with it in a written context. This could have an impact on our results and we will therefore query our participants to point out the possible *tussentaal* features in the review. However, we must consider a possible social desirability bias when discussing these results (van de Mortel, 2008). Our respondents might be prone to indicate they saw *tussentaal* features because they might suppose that this is what is expected from them.

Lybaert (2014) pointed out the importance of context in attitude towards language varieties and the Language Expectancy Theory of Burgoon and Miller (1985) suggests authors are bound to certain expectations depending on the context. Their theory implies that any deviation from the reader's expectancy could affect how the author is perceived. What people expect from online reviewers in terms of language use, however, remains unclear. Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) suggest that in a review context, the presence of *tussentaal* shows a negative effect on the author's intelligence and professionalism, the review's persuasiveness and writing quality. Moreover, the author was perceived as more impulsive. They also found that *tussentaal* appeared more acceptable than language errors to their participants regarding source intelligence.

On the one hand, standard Dutch attains more prestige and is considered a very formal variety (Lybaert, 2014). *Tussentaal*, on the other hand, has achieved popularity among younger people with its dynamic and cool reputation (Grondelaers & Lybaert, 2017). Especially in the context of online reviews, it remains unclear if *tussentaal* is accepted. We did include a high number of *tussentaal* features in our scenario (a density of 0,09%), which could increase the possibility of an effect on the perception of both the text and the author if we compare this to the results of Kreiner et al. (2012) on spelling errors. For our third hypothesis, we turn to the findings of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) as their design resembles our study. Their data suggests that *tussentaal* negatively affects the reviewer's intelligence and professionalism and the review's persuasiveness and writing quality. We should, however, keep in mind that the difference in positivity could have an impact as well. Thus, we carefully hypothesize that *tussentaal* will impact the perceptions of both the review and the reviewer.

### **H3: The presence of *tussentaal* features in an online review will affect the perceptions of the review or reviewer.**

#### 2.2.5 Gender and credibility

A person's credibility depends on more than their words only, demographic features also play a part (Pearson, 1982). Pearson (1982) investigated how gender affects credibility and found that context is key. For example, men are perceived as more credible when talking about cars, while women are believed to be experts in childcare. Pearson (1982) listed four traits when discussing credibility: competence, trustworthiness, dynamism and co-orientation. Men were perceived as more competent and more dynamic than women, but women scored higher on both trustworthiness and co-orientation. In general, men were regarded more credible than women. The male participants even indicated they thought they would be less credible had they been female and the female participants reported they would be perceived as more credible had they been male.

Another striking result from Pearson's study, was that people of the same sex find each other more credible (1982). This relates to homophily, which is defined by McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook (2001) as "the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (p.415). This principle is based on the idea that people with the same demographics, also share the same qualities and therefore choose to interact with each other (McPherson et al., 2001). Ayeh et al. (2013) also support the effect of the homophily principle on credibility in the context of user generated content. However, this is contested by findings of Brown, Roderick and Lee (2007) who suggest homophily in an online context can be reduced to shared interests and attitudes. Bickart and Schindler (2001) even mention that being customers is something both authors and readers of online fora have in common, which then lowers the importance for shared demographics.

A study by Armstrong and McAdams (2009) suggests that blogposts (which are conceptually close to online reviews) written by men are perceived as more credible than blogpost by women. Along the same lines, Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), indicate that a male reviewer appears

more credible, clearer and more reliable. Additionally, the review written by a man scored higher on text quality and usefulness. Reviewer “Peter” was perceived as more intelligent and professional than “Sofie”. Moreover, even the female participants of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) allocated more credibility to the male reviewer, contradicting the homophily principle. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that their scenario was quite negative and that a positive context might change this outcome. Burgoon and Miller (1985) suggest that, following their Language Expectancy Theory, extreme negativity is less accepted when it comes from a woman. This is corroborated by the results of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), as the female appeared impolite, emotional and impulsive. Changing the valence of the review might already affect these perceptions of the female reviewer.

Once again, there is no concord in the literature when considering gender and credibility. While Pearson (1982) strongly suggests the male gender is perceived as more credible and both Pearson (1982) and McPherson (2001) argue for the effect of homophily, a more recent source points out that the Internet has changed which similarities we prioritise (Brown et al., 2007). However, in the specific context of online reviews Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) indicate the male reviewer to be perceived more credible by both men and women. Whether this will change in a positive review remains unclear, but we do expect an effect of gender on the perception of both the review and reviewer.

**H4: Gender will influence the perceptions of an online review and its author.**



### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Design

The aim of this study is to analyse the effect of language errors, *tussentaal* and gender on the reader's perceptions of reviews and reviewers. As this study tries to build on the results from both Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), the design of our research could only deviate from theirs to a certain extent. Therefore, we also used a between-subjects design. In order to investigate whether language manipulations have a different impact in a positive review context, we adjusted the polarity of the scenario used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), which was based on a real review that was posted on Tripadvisor. Because their review was remarkably negative, we aimed for an equivalent level of positivity in our scenario. More specific information on how we operationalised this will be discussed in 3.2. After adjusting the polarity of the review setting, we created four different scenarios: a standard Dutch version (Scenario 1), a version with language errors (Scenario 2), a version with *tussentaal* (Scenario 3) and a version with both language errors and *tussentaal* (Scenario 4). These were then turned into eight reviews, four of which were written by a male reviewer named "Peter" (distributed by Lana Heirbaut) and the other four written by a female reviewer named "Sofie" (distributed by Steven Dendoncker). As far as the questionnaire is concerned, we replicated the constructs used in Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) and distributed the surveys through Facebook and Facebook Messenger. A total of 371 respondents was obtained for the reviews written by Peter (at the time of publication, the data collected by Dendoncker is not yet available). In the following pages, the experimental set-up will be discussed in more detail.

##### 3.1.1 Scenarios and manipulations

As mentioned above, we will try to determine if language errors, *tussentaal*, gender and positive polarity (i.e. the independent variables in this study) have an influence on perceptions such as credibility, professionalism and text clarity (i.e. the dependent variables) in the context of online reviews. We will now discuss how we implemented the independent variables in the aforementioned scenario used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). Their standard Dutch version can be seen in the image below. The reviewer elaborates on his visit to the Italian restaurant Porto Fino. He describes his experience as overall negative and a waste of money.

 **Peter**  
België

8 oktober 2017 beoordeeld

### Weggegooid geld

Na lang twijfelen zijn we vandaag eens gaan eten in Porto Fino. De bediening was slecht, het eten was niet lekker en de pasta met zeevruchten stonk. De pizza van mijn partner was verschrikkelijk, we hebben nog nooit zo slecht gegeten. En dan de wijn: een halve liter voor twaalf euro en hij smaakte naar azijn. We hebben dat wel gezegd maar toen stonden ze gewoon te lachen en zeiden ze dat het de chef zijn fout was. Wat een team! Ze zien mij hier niet meer terug en ik zal zeker geen reclame maken. Spijtig van mijn zure centen die ik hier heb verspild!

[Stel een vraag over Porto Fino](#)

Deze beoordeling is de persoonlijke mening van een TripAdvisor-lid en niet die van TripAdvisor LLC zelf.

Image 1 Standard Dutch scenario Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018)

Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) both indicated the extreme negativity of their scenario might have influenced the perceptions of the review and the reviewer. Therefore, our first manipulation is the change in polarity. We altered the standard Dutch version to a positive review without changing the context of a dinner at the Italian restaurant Porto Fino. We will now elaborate on the exact changes in wording. We wanted to preserve the element of money in the title and changed the negative title “Waste of money” into “Worth every penny”. The first sentence of the negative scenario indicates that the reviewer long doubted whether to go have dinner at Porto Fino, but today they finally did. We altered this sentence by including ‘finally’ instead of the reference to doubt. This small change in wording already suggests the person was eager to go to the restaurant prior to their visit rather than unenthusiastic. The following sentence of the negative review already criticises the service, the food and mentioned specifically that the seafood pasta stank. We decided to simply reverse the negative wording and not add any more information: the service was very good, the seafood pasta smelled delicious and the food was very nice. We applied the same tactic when modifying the third sentence from “My partner’s pizza was terrible, it was the worst meal we ever had” to “My partner’s pizza was simply fantastic, we have not had a meal this good in a long time”. Here we could not use ‘never’ in the positive sentence, as we feared this to sound impossibly good. Next,

the reviewer refer to the wine, which costs twelve euros for half a litre. We chose not to adjust this price as this is not an unreasonable amount at a restaurant. However, we did change the perceived flavour of the wine from vinegary to perfect. In the next sentence of the negative review, the reviewer declares they mentioned all of their complaints to the staff but that they were laughed at and the blame was shifted to the chef. This was then followed by a sarcastic comment “What a team!”. In our scenario, we also included the fact that the reviewer gave the staff feedback although positive one this time. We included that the staff was happy with the comments from the customers and instead of blaming the chef, they praised him/her: they said it was mostly thanks to the chef. Because of the positivity in the previous sentence, “A really great team!” does no longer sound sarcastic. The author of the negative review continues by saying they will not visit the restaurant again, nor spread positive word-of-mouth, while the reviewer of the positive scenario states they will definitely return and will gladly advertise the restaurant. Both ending sentences of the reviews refer again to the aspect of ‘being worth the money’. As opposed to stating they regret the money they spent there, the positive review repeats the fact that it was worth the money.



Image 2 Scenario 1: standard Dutch

As such, we aimed for a perceived level of positivity equal to the negative perceptions of the

review used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). We tested this by asking 43 people to rate our review on a scale from one to five, using the iconic tripadvisor rating tool. 74,4% Of the participants scored our review a five out of five or a four out of five, i.e. at the opposite end of the spectrum of the negative review.

This positive review in standard language served as the setting for three extra scenarios that include language manipulations. In the following paragraphs, these language manipulations will be elaborated on. For comparative purposes, we did not want to stray away too far from the original research by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) and therefore kept in mind the number and kinds of manipulations.

Firstly, we constructed the scenario with language errors (see Image 3). As we did not alter the original negative scenario in terms of content but merely reversed the negativity into positivity, we were able to implement almost the same language errors as Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). In our text of one hundred and four words, we inserted three errors: two spelling errors and one conjugational error (see paragraph below). The density of the language errors in our text is equal to the research of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) and, when comparing it to the study by Kreiner et al. (2012), we opted for quite a high number of errors (a density of 0.03%). Kreiner et al. suggested that a higher density (0.04%) is necessary for the author's image to be affected.

The first manipulation is a conjugational error of the verb to smell "ruiken". We used the wrong past tense "ruikte" instead of "rook". This only slightly differs from the first error in the study by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), which was the wrong past tense of "stinken" (to stink), "stinkte". We argue the same nature of error was used in both versions as the past tense of an irregular verb was used incorrectly twice. Our other errors were exactly the same as in the negative scenario. The second error can be found in another verb: the past participle of to say "zeggen" became "gezeit" instead of "gezegd". The final error we added is a spelling error of the word "reclame" (publicity) written as "recklame". These can be defined as phonological spelling errors. An overview of these manipulations in their context can be found in Table 1.



Image 3 Scenario 2: language errors

| Standard language   | Language error   |
|---|--|
| [... ] de pasta met zeevruchten rook heerlijk                 | [... ] de pasta met zeevruchten <i>ruikte</i> heerlijk               |
| [...] en ze hebben gezegd dat het vooral dankzij de chef was. | [...] en ze hebben <i>gezezt</i> dat het vooral dankzij de chef was. |
| [...] en ik maak met plezier reclame.                         | [...] en ik maak met plezier <i>reclame</i> .                        |

Table 1 Language errors

Secondly, we adjusted our standard Dutch scenario to a text with *tussentaal*. We opted for the same amount of *tussentaal* features as used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), i.e. nine. In order to avoid regional bias towards the language used, we tried to limit ourselves to using general *tussentaal* features as identified by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). A very common feature is the “t-deletion” at the end of words such as “niet” (not) and “dat” (that). According to Grondelaers and Lybaert (2017), this phonological manipulation causes a reduction in the perceived prestige. This same feature was used in the negative *tussentaal* scenario of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) with the words “niet” (not), “dat” (that) and “wat” (what). Additionally, we manipulated the article “een” (a(n)). In *tussentaal* this word is often inflected and becomes “ne” or “nen”. The same frequently occurs for the words “de” (the) and “die” (that/those), which then become “den”, “diene” or “dienen”. Another generally used feature of

*tussentaal* is the abbreviation of the word “ik” (I) to “k”. Both “nen” and “k” are used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). Lastly, we intended to insert a grammatical error of the same nature as “gelijk” instead of “als”, as used in the negative *tussentaal* review. We opted for “als” instead of “toen”. Both features stem from uses in dialects that have also entered *tussentaal*.



Image 4 Scenario 3: *tussentaal*

| Feature             | Standard Language                             | <i>Tussentaal</i>                                       |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Inflection of “een” | [...] eindelijk eens gaan eten in Porto Fino. | [...] eindelijk <i>ne</i> keer gaan eten in Porto Fino. |
| T-deletion: “niet”  | [...] was gewoonweg fantastisch.              | [...] was <i>nie</i> normaal lekker.                    |
| T-deletion: “niet”  | [...] al lang niet meer zo lekker gegeten.    | [...] al lang <i>ni</i> meer zo lekker gegeten.         |
| Inflection of “de”  | En dan de wijn [...]                          | En dan <i>diene</i> wijn [...]                          |
| Inflection of “een” | [...] een halve liter [...]                   | [...] <i>nen</i> halve liter [...]                      |
| Linking word error  | Ze waren echt tevreden toen [...]             | Ze waren echt tevreden <i>als</i> [...]                 |
| T-deletion: “dat”   | [...] we dat allemaal zeiden [...]            | [...] we <i>da</i> allemaal zeiden [...]                |
| Abreviation of “ik” | Ik Zal zeker nog terugkomen [...]             | <i>k</i> Zal zeker nog terugkomen [...]                 |
| Abreviation of “ik” | [...] en ik maak met plezier reclame.         | [...] en <i>k</i> maak met plezier reclame.             |

Table 2 *Tussentaal* features

Thirdly, we combined both the language errors and the *tussentaal* features in one scenario:



Image 5 Scenario 4: language errors and tussentaal

Our last independent variable is the gender of the reviewer. We added Peter or Sofie as the author of the review to each text, creating eight different scenarios. We decided not to change the names of the reviewers used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) as we want to be able to compare our findings to theirs having only changed the polarity of the review. It is also worth mentioning that even the name and not only the gender of the reviewer might affect their credibility. However, we will not look into this effect in this particular study.

### 3.1.2 Control variables

We also added a number of control variables: the respondent's gender, age, region, level and level of education, their personal experience with reviews, and their own tendency to write reviews and use non-standard language. There are a number of reasons for this. According to Pearson (1982), both the reader's and the author's gender may influence the perceived credibility of the text and the author. Moreover, the homophily principle suggests people

interact and relate more with others of the same demographic (McPherson et al., 2001). However, it is not clear whether the homophily principle can be applied to gender features only as Brown et al. (2007) pointed out that being a customer might already suffice for homophily in this context. Still, in addition to these shared interests as customers, we would like to examine whether or not gender does play a role. The second control variable is age. Our respondents' ages lie between eighteen and thirty years old. We specially aimed for this age group in view of their familiarity with online reviews and TripAdvisor (Depovere, 2018). We divided this group into two: eighteen to twenty-one and twenty-two to thirty. We opted for this division because the first age group consists of young people, mostly students, who have not yet been exposed to a professional context. This could have an impact of their expectations of reviews and language in a review context. We also requested the regional information of our respondents as a third control variable to check if language errors provoked different reactions depending on the respondents' regions. The fourth control variable is education, both level and kind, one of the assumptions being that respondents with a university degree (in languages) might have a more negative stance towards language errors and *tussentaal*. Additionally, we asked our respondents four questions regarding their own experience with writing online reviews and the language they use in an online (review) context. It makes sense that people's own behaviour will affect that of others: we might find that respondents who use *tussentaal* themselves in online contexts, will be more tolerant of non-standard language in online reviews. Additionally, we focussed on the reviewer himself/herself by asking our participants about their perceived review writing frequency and entertaining quality. The answers to these questions will provide us with the necessary information to critically examine our findings.

### 3.1.3 Constructs and semantic variables

We implemented the same nine constructs used by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) in our survey, with the exception of failure severity that was not relevant for the positive review under examination. These constructs were based on studies by Baker and Churchill (1977), Block and Ramanathan (2002), Mayo & Leshner (2000), Sundar (1999) and Whitehead (1968). A 7-point-likert scale was used to verify to what extent the respondents agreed with the statements, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). In order to verify the reliability of each construct, their Cronbach Alpha scores were calculated. This test is used to demonstrate if all questions within one construct probing into the same variable are answered similarly across the

data set. We set the cut-off point at 0.7, so any value lower than 0.7 correlates with an invalid construct. All constructs and their corresponding Cronbach Alpha scores are listed in the table below. Note that those aspects (positivity, text clarity and quality) that only use one statement cannot be subjected to Cronbach Alpha statistics (hence the / in the table below).

| <b>Construct</b>                 | <b>Cronbach Alpha score</b> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 0.89                        |
| Emotion                          | 0.93                        |
| Source intelligence              | 0.84                        |
| Positivity                       | /                           |
| Text clarity                     | /                           |
| Text quality                     | /                           |
| Usefulness                       | 0.90                        |
| Consumer intention               | 0.91                        |
| WOM intention                    | 0.86                        |

*Table 3 Constructs and their Cronbach Alpha scores*

All Cronbach Alpha scores are higher than 0.7, which implies that the participants answered all questions per construct similarly. We therefore consider our constructs reliable.

In addition to the constructs, we also added twelve semantic variables in our survey, which were examined through a 7-point Likert scale: clarity, professionalism, well-written, tone, reliability, friendliness, credibility, respect, conviction, politeness, emotionality and impulsiveness. Respondents had to indicate on a scale how well the review matches either of the two opposite descriptive adjectives at the extreme ends of the Likert-scale.

#### 3.1.4 Manipulation checks

The manipulation checks were included to verify whether respondents had actually spotted the independent variables we manipulate in the reviews, i.e. the presence or absence of mistakes and *tussentaal* and the gender of the reviewer. Because the names Peter and Sofie might also have an impact on reviewer credibility fuelled by age associations, we added a question on their perceived age as well.

### 3.2 Respondents

We distributed the survey through Facebook and Facebook Messenger and reached a total of 493 respondents, of which 371 (75,3%) filled in our survey completely. We decided to discard all incomplete answers, as we cannot be certain these respondents were fully dedicated to the questionnaire. Therefore, the following numbers only apply to the 371 completed surveys. We collected responses from 258 (69.5%) women, 112 (30.2%) men and one respondent (0.3%) identified as 'X'. In the separate scenarios, however, we see two worryingly low numbers of male respondents. Both Scenario 1 (21.1% male respondents) and Scenario 3 (29.7% male respondents) did not reach thirty male participants. This means we will have to regard our findings surrounding these scenarios and gender impact with caution. From our first age group (eighteen to twenty-one) 233 participants (62.8%) filled in our surveys, and 138 respondents (37.2%) were between the ages of twenty-two and thirty. About 43.7% of our respondents have an academic degree and 79.8% are currently enrolled in a university or college. This means that most of our respondents are currently students, which might have an impact on their perceptions of online reviews. Moreover, 8.9% of our total number of respondents has a language related degree. This is not enough to prove any possible difference in outlook on non-standard language in online reviews, but also ensures us that this will not be a factor in our pool of data. A vast majority of our respondents (65.8%) are located in East-Flanders. West Flanders is represented by 67 (18.1%) respondents, Antwerp by 23 (6.2%), Flemish Brabant by 22 (5.9%). The other regions, Limburg, Brussels Capital region, and Other, have merely six, four and five respondents respectively. We will therefore not be able to investigate the differences between the regions. In the tables below, the exact numbers per scenario are shown.

#### **Gender**

|                   | <b>Female</b> | <b>Male</b> | <b>Other</b> |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| <b>Scenario 1</b> | 70 (77.8%)    | 19 (21.1%)  | 1 (0.1%)     |
| <b>Scenario 2</b> | 62 (64.6%)    | 34 (35.4%)  | 0            |
| <b>Scenario 3</b> | 52 (70.3%)    | 22 (29.7%)  | 0            |
| <b>Scenario 4</b> | 74 (66.7%)    | 37 (33.3%)  | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>      | 258 (69.5%)   | 112 (30.2%) | 1 (0.3%)     |

*Table 4 Respondents: gender*

## Age

|                   | <b>18- 21</b> | <b>22- 30</b> |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Scenario 1</b> | 59 (64.8%)    | 31 (34.4%)    |
| <b>Scenario 2</b> | 64 (66.7%)    | 32 (33.3%)    |
| <b>Scenario 3</b> | 39 (52.7%)    | 35 (47.3%)    |
| <b>Scenario 4</b> | 72 (64.9%)    | 39 (35.1%)    |
| <b>Total</b>      | 233 (62.8%)   | 138 (37.2%)   |

Table 5 Respondents: age

## Academic degree

|                   | <b>No degree</b> | <b>Secondary</b> | <b>Professional Bachelor</b> | <b>Academic Bachelor</b> | <b>Master</b> | <b>Doctorate degree</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Scenario 1</b> | 0                | 48 (53.3%)       | 15 (16.7%)                   | 17 (18.9%)               | 10 (11.1%)    | 0                       |
| <b>Scenario 2</b> | 0                | 51 (53.1%)       | 13 (13.5%)                   | 25 (26.0%)               | 7 (7.3%)      | 0                       |
| <b>Scenario 3</b> | 0                | 42 (56.8%)       | 14 (18.8%)                   | 9 (12.2%)                | 9 (12.2%)     | 0                       |
| <b>Scenario 4</b> | 0                | 68 (61.3%)       | 17 (15.3%)                   | 20 (18.0%)               | 6 (5.4%)      | 0                       |
| <b>Total</b>      | 0                | 209 (56.3%)      | 59 (15.9%)                   | 71(19.1%)                | 32 (8.7%)     | 0                       |

Table 6 Respondents: academic degree

|                   | <b>Currently enrolled</b> | <b>Not currently enrolled</b> |
|-------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Scenario 1</b> | 74 (82.2%)                | 16 (17.8%)                    |
| <b>Scenario 2</b> | 80 (83.3%)                | 16 (16.7%)                    |
| <b>Scenario 3</b> | 53 (71.6%)                | 21 (28.4%)                    |
| <b>Scenario 4</b> | 89 (80.2%)                | 22 (19.8%)                    |
| <b>Total</b>      | 296 (79.8%)               | 75 (20.2%)                    |

Table 7 Respondents: currently enrolled

|                   | <b>No higher education degree</b> | <b>Language degree</b> | <b>Other degree</b> | <b>Unknown</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| <b>Scenario 1</b> | 3 (3.3%)                          | 7 (7.8%)               | 79 (87.8%)          | 1 (1.1%)       |
| <b>Scenario 2</b> | 5 (5.2%)                          | 7 (7.3%)               | 84 (87.5%)          | 0              |
| <b>Scenario 3</b> | 5 (6.8%)                          | 3 (4.1%)               | 64 (86.5%)          | 2 (2.7%)       |
| <b>Scenario 4</b> | 8 (7.2%)                          | 16 (14.4%)             | 83 (74.8%)          | 4 (3.6%)       |
| <b>Total</b>      | 21 (5.7%)                         | 33 (8.9%)              | 310 (83.6%)         | 7 (1.9%)       |

Table 8 Respondents: type of academic degree

### Region

|                   | <b>Other</b> | <b>Antwerp</b> | <b>Lim-<br/>burg</b> | <b>East-<br/>Flanders</b> | <b>Flemish<br/>Brabant</b> | <b>West-<br/>Flanders</b> | <b>Brussels<br/>Capital<br/>region</b> |
|-------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Scenario 1</b> | 3 (3.3%)     | 8 (8.9%)       | 0                    | 56 (62.2%)                | 7 (7.8%)                   | 15 (16.7%)                | 1 (1.1%)                               |
| <b>Scenario 2</b> | 0            | 6 (6.3%)       | 5 (5.2%)             | 65 (67.7%)                | 2 (2.1%)                   | 16 (16.7%)                | 2 (2.1%)                               |
| <b>Scenario 3</b> | 1 (1.4%)     | 3 (4.1%)       | 1 (1.4%)             | 52 (70.3%)                | 6 (8.1%)                   | 11 (11.5%)                | 0                                      |
| <b>Scenario 4</b> | 1 (0.9%)     | 6 (5.4%)       | 0                    | 71 (64.0%)                | 7 (6.3%)                   | 25 (22.5%)                | 1 (0.9%)                               |
| <b>Total</b>      | 5 (1.3%)     | 23 (6.2%)      | 6 (1.6%)             | 244 (65.8%)               | 22 (5.9%)                  | 67 (18.1%)                | 4 (1.1%)                               |

Table 9 Respondents: region

## 4 DATA ANALYSIS

We will now discuss which statistical tests we used to analyse the data. As mentioned in 3.2.1, all constructs can be treated as reliable as their Cronbach Alpha scores are higher than the 0.7 cut-off point. We will first discuss the results of the constructs, followed by an analysis of the semantic variables' outcomes. We used the statistical analysis program SPSS 25 to perform the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests and Mann-Whitney U tests.

### 4.1 Manipulation checks

#### **Language errors and *tussentaal***

The first scenario was written in standard Dutch; still no less than 48.9% of the participants indicated they noticed language errors in the review. This may be explained through social desirability: the respondents answer what they think is expected of them (van de Mortel, 2008). The fact that very question is raised creates suspicion about the fact there may have been a mistake they had not spotted. In order to control this, we also asked our respondents if they could give us one or more examples of the errors they saw in the survey. Obviously, as there were no errors in the first scenario, 93.3% answered “no”. The six people who answered “yes”, gave us wrong examples. Because the question itself can trigger an awareness about possible mistakes that was not there before (or at least not in the way the actual mistakes in the other scenarios do), we asked the questions at the end of the questionnaire. In other words, all questions regarding the perceptions of the review and the reviewer could not have been influenced by social desirability. Additionally, we do feel that the impact of supposedly perceived mistakes is low, especially compared to the other scenarios. We therefore decided not to disregard half of the data for Scenario 1.

The second and fourth scenario did contain language errors and 82.3% and 98.2% of the respondents noticed them. This rather high percentage suggests we applied a good density (0.03%) and that the manipulation was successful. Note that the percentage in the fourth scenario is higher, probably fuelled by the presence of *tussentaal*, which, for some respondents, may also have been labelled as wrong. The examples the respondents provided us with, however, mostly did refer to language errors. As far as the *tussentaal* features are concerned,

roughly 83% of the respondents noticed their presence in the third scenario and 77.5% in the fourth scenario. It should also be observed, though, that about 92% of respondents also labelled Scenario 3 as containing mistakes, when referring to *tussentaal* (see also our comments above regarding Scenario 4). Based on this we did not, however, exclude these answers from the data analysis. First, the main aim of the manipulation test was to ensure that respondents had actually seen the *tussentaal* features, irrespective of what they think about them. Second, the fact that they label them as ‘mistakes’ is also indicative of the attitude they have to them in these particular contexts. In a way then, the manipulation check also has some explanatory power to account for the attitude towards the use of *tussentaal* features. While perhaps not language errors in the strict sense of the word, their use is still regarded as ‘wrong’. Third, since most of the respondents adopted this attitude, the impact is believed to be stable in view of these shared attitudes. Finally, one of the reasons why respondents went for the ‘language mistake’ label may also be related to the fact that respondents may not have been all too familiar with the notion of *tussentaal*, regardless of the explanatory examples that were given. Extrapolating this particular aspect of language assessment to a new context might have been a bridge too far.

### **Gender of the reviewer**

Most respondents (84%) noticed the reviewer was male. Roughly 8% of the respondents did not remember and another 8% thought the review was written by a woman, which is quite surprising in view of the fact that Peter was mentioned repeatedly in the survey.

## 4.2 The impact of language errors and *tussentaal* features

### 4.2.1 Constructs

First, we will list the means per construct in the chart and table below. This provides us with an overview of the differences in perceptions between the scenarios. All questions related to the constructs were answered on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

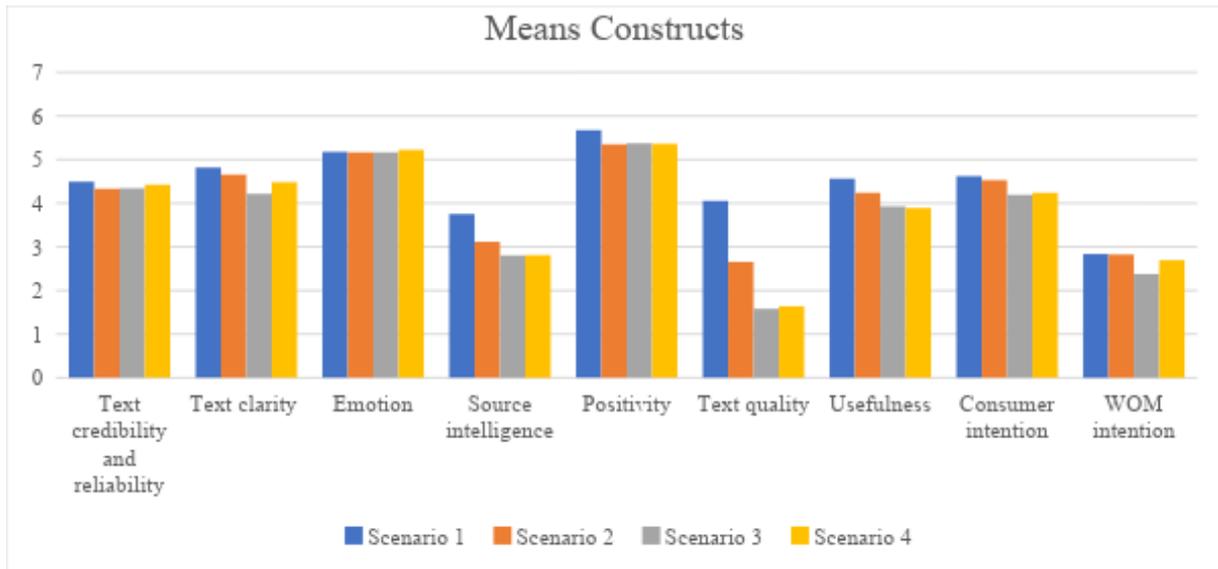


Figure 2 Overview means constructs

| Construct                        | Scenario 1<br>Standard<br>Dutch | Scenario 2<br>Language<br>errors | Scenario 3<br><i>Tussentaal</i> | Scenario 4<br>Language errors and<br><i>tussentaal</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Text credibility and reliability | 4.49                            | 4.34                             | 4.34                            | 4.43   |
| Text clarity                     | 4.82                            | 4.66                             | 4.22                            | 4.48   |
| Emotion                          | 5.18                            | 5.17                             | 5.17                            | 5.22   |
| Source intelligence              | 3.75                            | 3.12                             | 2.80                            | 2.81   |
| Positivity                       | 5.68                            | 5.35                             | 5.38                            | 5.36   |
| Text quality                     | 4.06                            | 2.66                             | 1.58                            | 1.64   |
| Usefulness                       | 4.56                            | 4.24                             | 3.93                            | 3.90   |
| Consumer intention               | 4.62                            | 4.53                             | 4.19                            | 4.23   |
| WOM intention                    | 2.84                            | 2.83                             | 2.38                            | 2.70   |

Table 10 Means constructs

Table 10 shows similar results between the scenarios regarding text credibility and reliability, which also indicate all reviews obtain a rather neutral score on the 7-point Likert scale. In contradiction to Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), we do not see any real impact made by language manipulations on the perceived credibility of the review. Emotion, positivity and WOM intention show the same trend of comparable numbers between the scenarios. Both the constructs emotion and positivity score around “rather agree” on the scale, which is not

surprising as our positive review praised the restaurant. WOM intention obtains much lower scores between “disagree” and “rather disagree”. The reason WOM is so low, may have several causes. First, credibility is fairly low overall, so respondents would not feel very inclined to pass on the content which they attach low credibility to. Second, low WOM may also be related to the isolated set-up of the experiment. Normally, people assess the quality of a restaurant based on the average ratings given to it by a substantial number of reviewers, not based on one review. Regardless of its polarity, the fact that there is only review may impede the inclination to engage in WOM. The construct text clarity shows rather similar numbers between the scenarios. Nonetheless, when we compare the mean value of Scenario 1 (M= 4.82) with Scenario 3 (M= 4.22), we do see a slight drop in the perceived clarity of the review that could be caused by the presence of *tussentaal*. Scenario 4 (M= 4.48), however, obtained a mean value closer to Scenario 1 even though Scenario 4 also contains *tussentaal*. The perceived intelligence of the reviewer did receive remarkably lower mean values for the scenarios that contain non-standard language. All scenarios received rather low scores, even the standard Dutch scenario obtained a mean value lower than “neutral”. In other words, the reviewer did not appear very intelligent, but did lose even more of his perceived IQ when there was non-standard language in the review. We also notice a striking difference between the standard Dutch review and the reviews with language manipulations regarding the text quality. *Tussentaal* seems to negatively affect the quality of the review, even more so than language errors. We also want to point out that even the standard Dutch scenario only reached a “neutral” score on text quality. The consumer intention after reading the review also scores around “neutral” on the scale, this could also be related to the “neutral” credibility perceptions. *Tussentaal* appears to negatively influence this construct as well. We see the same trend in the mean values of the construct usefulness.

Based on these means per construct, we used the Kruskal-Wallis test to calculate the p-scores per construct. We set the cut-off point at 0.05, meaning that any value higher than this number will be regarded as insignificant. The table below shows significant differences between the scenarios for the constructs source intelligence, text quality, usefulness and consumer intention. However, we should also point out that the constructs of text clarity and WOM intention are near significant with p-values of 0.068 and 0.062 respectively.

| Construct                        | p-score      |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 0.933        |
| Text clarity                     | 0.068        |
| Emotion                          | 0.998        |
| <b>Source intelligence</b>       | <b>0.000</b> |
| Positivity                       | 0.151        |
| <b>Text quality</b>              | <b>0.000</b> |
| <b>Usefulness</b>                | <b>0.006</b> |
| <b>Consumer intention</b>        | <b>0.048</b> |
| WOM intention                    | 0.062        |

Table 11 Kruskal-Wallis test constructs

For each of these constructs we applied the Mann-Whitney U test to determine where the difference emerges in the scenarios. We included the Bonferroni correction in these pairwise comparisons, which should guarantee actual statistical significance.

|                            |              |              |              |              |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Source intelligence</b> | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1                 | -            | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2                 | <b>0.000</b> | -            | 0.582        | 1.000        |
| Scenario 3                 | <b>0.000</b> | 0.582        | -            | 0.407        |
| Scenario 4                 | <b>0.000</b> | 1.000        | 0.407        | -            |
| <b>Text quality</b>        | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1                 | -            | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2                 | <b>0.000</b> | -            | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 3                 | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4                 | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Usefulness</b>          | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1                 | -            | 0.943        | <b>0.025</b> | <b>0.011</b> |
| Scenario 2                 | 0.943        | -            | 0.741        | 0.542        |
| Scenario 3                 | <b>0.025</b> | 0.741        | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4                 | <b>0.011</b> | 0.542        | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Consumer intention</b>  | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1                 | -            | 1.000        | 0.231        | 0.092        |
| Scenario 2                 | 1.000        | -            | 0.933        | 0.524        |
| Scenario 3                 | 0.231        | 0.933        | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4                 | 0.092        | 0.524        | 1.000        | -            |

Table 12 Mann-Whitney U test: source intelligence, text quality, usefulness, consumer intention

The presence of non-standard language appears to significantly lower the perceived intelligence of the reviewer and the text quality. This corroborates H2 and H3 and is in line with the findings of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). Surprisingly, *tussentaal* seems to have a similar amount of impact on the reviewer's perceived intelligence as language errors, while the literature suggests it should have a dynamic status (Grondelaers & Lybaert, 2017). Moreover, *tussentaal* features seem to have an even greater impact than language errors on the perceived quality of the review. This could be due to the higher density of non-standard language in Scenario 3 (0.09%) and Scenario 4 (0.12%) compared to Scenario 2 (0.03%). Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) applied the same densities and also found a significant difference between the scenarios with language errors or *tussentaal* and the scenario with both *tussentaal* and language errors. Thus, the greater density might also have influenced the findings of both studies. Additionally, *tussentaal* also affected the perceived usefulness of the review, while language errors alone did not. Scenario 4 also shows to differ significantly from Scenario 1. However, this might again be a result of the presence of *tussentaal* and not language errors as the mean values of Scenario 3 and Scenario 4 are very similar. H2 is, in other words, not supported for this construct, but H3 is. This could again be caused by the higher density of non-standard language in the scenarios that include *tussentaal* but Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) did not see this effect. When we take into account the Bonferroni correction, there is no impact of non-standard language on the consumer intention. We should, however, mention a near-significant p-value between Scenario 1 and Scenario 4. This could point to a possible negative impact of language errors and *tussentaal* on this construct. In general, we found far less significant p-values than Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) whose data implies that non-standard language has an impact on all nine constructs. Thus, even though H2 and H3 are partly supported by the constructs source intelligence and text quality, we expected a lot more perceptions to be affected, especially the perceived credibility of the review. We will now consider if the semantic variables reinforce the above mentioned findings.

#### 4.2.2 Semantic variables

We applied the same statistical tests (Kruskal-Wallis test and Mann-Whitney U test) to analyse the twelve semantic variables. The mean values per scenario are shown in the chart and table below and were also based on a 7-point Likert scale.

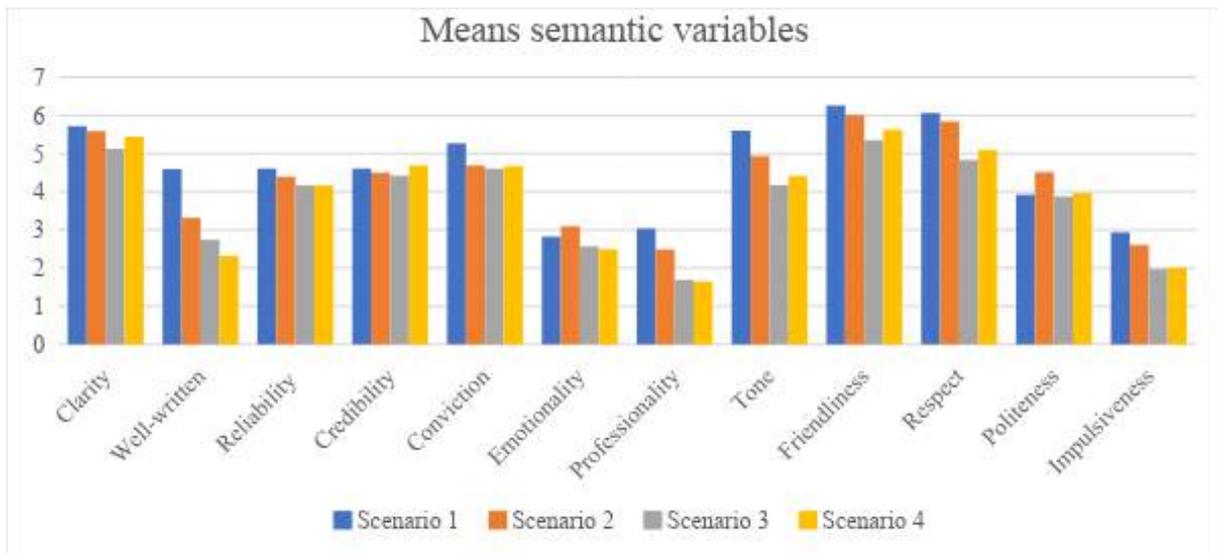


Figure 3 Overview means semantic variables

|                 | Scenario 1 | Scenario 2 | Scenario 3 | Scenario 4 |
|-----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Clarity         | 5.71       | 5.58       | 5.12       | 5.44       |
| Well-written    | 4.61       | 3.31       | 2.74       | 2.32       |
| Reliability     | 4.61       | 4.40       | 4.16       | 4.16       |
| Credibility     | 4.61       | 4.50       | 4.42       | 4.68       |
| Conviction      | 5.27       | 4.69       | 4.61       | 4.67       |
| Emotionality    | 2.82       | 3.09       | 2.57       | 2.50       |
| Professionalism | 3.03       | 2.49       | 1.69       | 1.69       |
| Tone            | 5.60       | 4.94       | 4.18       | 4.41       |
| Friendliness    | 6.26       | 6.01       | 5.35       | 5.62       |
| Respect         | 6.06       | 5.83       | 4.82       | 5.10       |
| Politeness      | 3.92       | 4.51       | 3.88       | 3.96       |
| Impulsiveness   | 2.93       | 2.60       | 1.97       | 2.01       |

Table 13 Overview means semantic variables

Based on the mean values, we can already discuss some trends. The clarity of the review seems to be lower in Scenario 3 compared to Scenario 1 while Scenario 2 shows little impact. In general, the review is perceived as “rather clear”, while the construct probing the clarity scored around “neutral” on the 7-point Likert scale. In line with the construct text quality, the scenarios with language manipulations scored remarkably lower on the variable ‘well-written’, even more so regarding the scenarios with *tussentaal*. Both variables reliability and credibility score very similar mean values across the scenarios, which could confirm the lack of impact of non-standard language we found for the construct text reliability and credibility. All mean values even indicate the same “neutral” perception of both the construct and de two variables. We mentioned that the convincing power of a review was dependent on its perceived credibility (Ayeh et al., 2013), but our data shows a strikingly higher mean value for Scenario 1 for

conviction (M= 5.27) in comparison to credibility (M= 4.61). Additionally, based on the mean values, it appears the semantic variable conviction is negatively affected by non-standard language. All versions of the review also seem to appear rather emotional, impulsive and unprofessional and the language manipulations strengthen these perceptions. Tone, friendliness and respect all obtained rather high scores, which is not surprising as we used a positive review. It also appears that *tussentaal* has a negative impact on these three semantic variables.

We also calculated the p-scores per semantic variable and found that non-standard language affects the semantic variables clarity, well-written, conviction, emotionality, professionalism, tone, friendliness, respect, politeness and impulsiveness. We also want to point out that the variable reliability is close to significance with a p-score of 0.087. We will now discuss the semantic variables in more detail and compare them to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test of the constructs

| Semantic variable      | p-score      |
|------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Clarity</b>         | <b>0.025</b> |
| <b>Well-written</b>    | <b>0.000</b> |
| Reliability            | 0.087        |
| Credibility            | 0.592        |
| <b>Conviction</b>      | <b>0.008</b> |
| <b>Emotionality</b>    | <b>0.011</b> |
| <b>Professionalism</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| <b>Tone</b>            | <b>0.000</b> |
| <b>Friendliness</b>    | <b>0.000</b> |
| <b>Respect</b>         | <b>0.000</b> |
| <b>Politeness</b>      | <b>0.000</b> |
| <b>Impulsiveness</b>   | <b>0.000</b> |

Table 14 Kruskal-Wallis test semantic variables

| <b>Clarity</b> | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2 | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4 |
|----------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Scenario 1     | -            | 1.000      | <b>0.028</b> | 0.757      |
| Scenario 2     | 1.000        | -          | 0.096        | 1.000      |
| Scenario 3     | <b>0.028</b> | 0.096      | -            | 0.407      |

|                        |              |              |              |              |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Scenario 4             | 0.757        | 1.000        | 0.407        | -            |
| <b>Well-written</b>    | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2             | <b>0.000</b> | -            | 0.201        | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 3             | <b>0.000</b> | 0.201        | -            | 0.248        |
| Scenario 4             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | 0.248        | -            |
| <b>Conviction</b>      | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | <b>0.028</b> | <b>0.024</b> | <b>0.038</b> |
| Scenario 2             | <b>0.028</b> | -            | 1.000        | 1.000        |
| Scenario 3             | <b>0.024</b> | 1.000        | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4             | <b>0.038</b> | 1.000        | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Emotionality</b>    | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | 1.000        | 0.932        | 0.453        |
| Scenario 2             | 1.000        | -            | 0.073        | <b>0.017</b> |
| Scenario 3             | 0.932        | 0.073        | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4             | 0.453        | <b>0.017</b> | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Professionalism</b> | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | <b>0.014</b> | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2             | <b>0.014</b> | -            | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 3             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Tone</b>            | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | <b>0.023</b> | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2             | <b>0.023</b> | -            | <b>0.021</b> | 0.134        |
| Scenario 3             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.021</b> | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4             | <b>0.000</b> | 0.134        | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Friendliness</b>    | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | 0.445        | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2             | 0.445        | -            | <b>0.002</b> | 0.138        |
| Scenario 3             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.002</b> | -            | 0.583        |
| Scenario 4             | <b>0.000</b> | 0.138        | 0.583        | -            |
| <b>Respect</b>         | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | 0.951        | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2             | 0.951        | -            | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 3             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Politeness</b>      | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | 0.347        | 0.151        | 0.420        |
| Scenario 2             | 0.347        | -            | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.001</b> |
| Scenario 3             | 0.151        | <b>0.000</b> | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4             | 0.420        | <b>0.001</b> | 1.000        | -            |
| <b>Impulsiveness</b>   | Scenario 1   | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3   | Scenario 4   |
| Scenario 1             | -            | 0.429        | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.000</b> |
| Scenario 2             | 0.429        | -            | <b>0.049</b> | <b>0.041</b> |
| Scenario 3             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.049</b> | -            | 1.000        |
| Scenario 4             | <b>0.000</b> | <b>0.041</b> | 1.000        | -            |

Table 15 Mann-Whitney U test: semantic variables

The semantic variables well-written and clarity uphold our findings for the constructs of text quality and clarity. Reviews that contain non-standard language appear less convincing according to our data. Both language errors and *ortussentaal* features affect the semantic variable conviction in a negative way. This corroborates both H2 and H3. We could link this to the construct of consumer intention, where we could not find any significant differences between the scenarios although the p-value of the Kruskal Wallis test did signal a possible effect. While our respondents indicated neutral scores for consumer intention, the review was perceived rather convincing. The reviewer also appears less professional when he uses non-standard language and even less so when he uses *tussentaal*. The presence of non-standard language makes the review seem more impulsive and the perceived tone also suffers. Moreover, *tussentaal* has a negative impact on the perceived level of respect and friendliness. The fact that language errors do not alter the semantic variable respect while *tussentaal* features do, can be explained by the possibility that people recognise the use of *tussentaal* as intentional, while language errors are not. Therefore, our respondents might have penalised the use of *tussentaal* to a larger extent.

In conclusion, four out of nine constructs were affected by our language manipulations: source intelligence, text quality, usefulness and consumer intention. We then compared our scenarios separately to distinguish the effect of language errors from the effect of *tussentaal* features. We found data confirming our second hypothesis that language errors negatively alter the perceptions of the reviewer and the review. Both source intelligence and text quality were negatively influenced due to the language errors we implemented. For all other constructs, however, we could not find support for H2. Regarding our third hypothesis, three out of the nine constructs corroborate our expectations. In line with our prior beliefs that *tussentaal* features would affect how the review and reviewer would be perceived, the constructs source intelligence, text quality and usefulness were negatively influenced by *tussentaal*. Additionally, ten out of twelve semantic variables (clarity, well-written, conviction, emotionality, professionalism, tone, friendliness, respect, politeness, impulsiveness) show a statistically relevant difference caused by the language manipulations. The variables well-written, conviction, professionalism and tone were all negatively altered by language errors, thus corroborating H2. However, we did not see any statistically relevant distinction between the standard Dutch scenario and the one with language errors regarding credibility, reliability, clarity, friendliness, respect, impulsiveness, politeness or emotionality. In other words, only

some perceptions are negatively influenced by language errors in a positive online review. We also hypothesized that *tussentaal* would affect the perceptions of the review and reviewer as Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) found evidence for this. Our data supports this hypothesis for the variables of clarity, friendliness, respect, impulsiveness, well-written, conviction, professionalism and tone in comparison with the standard Dutch scenario. Thus, H3 is supported.

#### 4.3 Impact of gender of respondents

We hypothesised that both the gender of the reader and the author would influence the perceptions of the review and the reviewer. However, as the data of the positive scenarios written by the female reviewer is not yet available at the time of publication, we will focus on the gender of the respondents only. In other words, we cannot discuss any possible effect of the reviewer's gender on the respondents' perceptions. In order to verify if men are perceived as more credible, as suggested by Pearson (1968), or if homophily plays a role in online reviews, Dendoncker will need to compare our dataset to his.

We obtained a total of 258 women and 112 men. Additionally, one of our participants identified as 'X'. Unfortunately, we cannot take into account their response into our statistical analyses, as one person cannot represent an entire group. Moreover, it is important to mention we collected more questionnaires from women (69.5%) than from men (30.2%). For two scenarios, Scenario 1 and Scenario 3, we only reached nineteen and twenty-two male respondents, respectively. The results for these two scenarios should therefore be considered with caution.

##### 4.3.1 Constructs

Table 16 shows the results of the Mann-Whitney U test for each construct per scenario. The cut-off point was again set at 0.05. Positivity, usefulness and consumer intention seem to generate significantly different scores between men and women in Scenario 2. We also note some near-significant scores in Scenario 2 for text credibility and reliability ( $p= 0.093$ ) and text quality ( $p= 0.053$ ). Additionally, there is one near significant score for source intelligence in Scenario 3 ( $p= 0.051$ ).

|                                  | Scenario 1 | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3 | Scenario 4 |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 0.612      | 0.093        | 0.129      | 0.552      |
| Text clarity                     | 0.988      | 0.857        | 0.546      | 0.132      |
| Emotion                          | 0.773      | 0.763        | 0.362      | 0.245      |
| Source intelligence              | 0.093      | 0.413        | 0.051      | 0.883      |
| Positivity                       | 0.415      | <b>0.000</b> | 0.322      | 0.933      |
| Text quality                     | 0.655      | 0.053        | 0.222      | 0.790      |
| Usefulness                       | 0.710      | <b>0.013</b> | 0.808      | 0.787      |
| Consumer intention               | 0.785      | <b>0.003</b> | 0.615      | 0.982      |
| WOM intention                    | 0.853      | 0.140        | 0.294      | 0.695      |

Table 16 Mann-Whitney U test constructs: gender

|                                  | Scenario 1 |      | Scenario 2  |             | Scenario 3 |      | Scenario 4 |      |
|----------------------------------|------------|------|-------------|-------------|------------|------|------------|------|
|                                  | M          | F    | M           | F           | M          | F    | M          | F    |
| Text credibility and reliability | 4.65       | 4.44 | 4.01        | 4.52        | 4.65       | 4.21 | 4.49       | 4.40 |
| Text clarity                     | 4.84       | 4.80 | 4.62        | 4.68        | 4.41       | 4.13 | 4.73       | 4.35 |
| Emotion                          | 5.21       | 5.17 | 5.15        | 5.18        | 4.93       | 5.27 | 5.41       | 5.13 |
| Source intelligence              | 4.04       | 3.66 | 3.21        | 3.06        | 3.09       | 2.68 | 2.83       | 2.80 |
| Positivity                       | 5.53       | 5.71 | <b>4.79</b> | <b>5.66</b> | 5.14       | 5.48 | 5.38       | 5.35 |
| Text quality                     | 3.89       | 4.09 | 3.03        | 2.45        | 1.68       | 1.54 | 1.68       | 1.62 |
| Usefulness                       | 4.40       | 4.59 | <b>3.73</b> | <b>4.52</b> | 3.95       | 3.92 | 3.91       | 3.89 |
| Consumer intention               | 4.58       | 4.62 | <b>4.15</b> | <b>4.74</b> | 4.09       | 4.24 | 4.23       | 4.24 |
| WOM intention                    | 2.79       | 2.84 | 2.55        | 2.98        | 2.63       | 2.27 | 2.81       | 2.64 |

Table 17 Means per construct: gender

There appears to be no general trend in differences between the perceptions of men and women regarding the constructs and most differences are small and statically insignificant. However, our data does show that women allocated higher scores to the positivity, usefulness and consumer intention of the review with language errors. Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) registered the same effect of the respondents' gender on consumer intention in a negative review with language errors. When we compare the mean values of Scenario 2 with Scenario 1 for these three constructs, we see that men have a stronger negative reaction to language errors than

women do. This finding is contradictory to the data of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), which suggests that men would be more tolerant than women regarding language errors.

#### 4.3.2 Semantic variables

We applied the same statistical test to the semantic variables and found valuable p-scores for reliability and conviction in Scenario 2. There is also one near-significant value in Scenario 1 for politeness ( $p= 0.084$ ) However, there is again no general trend in men's and women's attitudes toward the semantic variables.

|                 | Scenario 1 | Scenario 2   | Scenario 3 | Scenario 4 |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| Clarity         | 0.674      | 0.693        | 0.516      | 0.196      |
| Well-written    | 0.315      | 0.479        | 0.879      | 0.907      |
| Reliability     | 0.392      | <b>0.004</b> | 0.879      | 0.328      |
| Credibility     | 0.688      | 0.768        | 0.937      | 0.857      |
| Conviction      | 0.967      | <b>0.044</b> | 0.781      | 0.582      |
| Emotionality    | 0.702      | 0.227        | 0.534      | 0.995      |
| Professionality | 0.381      | 0.658        | 0.295      | 0.377      |
| Tone            | 0.414      | 0.857        | 0.838      | 0.687      |
| Friendliness    | 0.665      | 0.783        | 0.401      | 0.831      |
| Respect         | 0.379      | 0.467        | 0.741      | 0.739      |
| Politeness      | 0.087      | 0.927        | 0.936      | 0.685      |
| Impulsiveness   | 0.638      | 0.249        | 0.111      | 0.858      |

Table 18 Mann-Whitney U test semantic variables: gender

|                 | Scenario 1 |      | Scenario 2  |             | Scenario 3 |      | Scenario 4 |      |
|-----------------|------------|------|-------------|-------------|------------|------|------------|------|
|                 | M          | F    | M           | F           | M          | F    | M          | F    |
| Clarity         | 5.63       | 5.71 | 5.50        | 5.63        | 5.27       | 5.06 | 5.68       | 5.32 |
| Well-written    | 4.89       | 4.49 | 3.44        | 3.24        | 2.77       | 2.73 | 2.30       | 2.34 |
| Reliability     | 4.79       | 4.54 | <b>3.79</b> | <b>4.73</b> | 4.09       | 4.19 | 4.32       | 4.08 |
| Credibility     | 4.68       | 4.59 | 4.32        | 4.60        | 4.45       | 4.40 | 4.59       | 4.73 |
| Conviction      | 5.16       | 5.29 | <b>4.21</b> | <b>4.95</b> | 4.59       | 4.62 | 4.73       | 4.64 |
| Emotionality    | 2.74       | 2.83 | 2.79        | 3.26        | 2.77       | 2.48 | 2.46       | 2.51 |
| Professionality | 3.21       | 2.96 | 2.56        | 2.45        | 1.86       | 1.62 | 1.54       | 1.70 |
| Tone            | 5.32       | 5.67 | 4.85        | 4.98        | 4.23       | 4.15 | 4.43       | 4.41 |

|               |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Friendliness  | 6.11 | 6.29 | 5.97 | 6.03 | 5.36 | 5.35 | 5.59 | 5.64 |
| Respect       | 5.84 | 6.10 | 5.76 | 5.87 | 4.68 | 4.88 | 5.16 | 5.07 |
| Politeness    | 3.53 | 4.07 | 4.53 | 4.50 | 3.86 | 3.88 | 4.05 | 3.92 |
| Impulsiveness | 2.79 | 2.97 | 2.71 | 2.55 | 2.27 | 1.85 | 2.03 | 2.00 |

Table 19 Means per construct: gender

The mean values show us that the female respondents found the review with language errors more reliable and more convincing than the male respondents did. Similar to our findings for the constructs positivity, usefulness and consumer intention, the female respondents seem more tolerant towards language errors. Every other construct obtained rather similar results of both genders per scenario. Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) also recorded little effect of the respondents' gender on the perceptions of the male reviewer and his negative review.

To conclude, we found little evidence that gender influences the perceptions of the review and reviewer. We could suggest that women have more positive perceptions of online reviews with language errors considering the constructs positivity, usefulness and consumer intention and the variables reliability and conviction. In contradiction to Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) who suggested men to be more permissive of language errors, our male respondents appear less tolerant of our manipulations in Scenario 2. A general effect has not been found, though. This partly rejects H4. However, we cannot fully conclude the effect of gender on the perceptions as we lack the data of our female reviewer.

#### 4.4 Impact of positivity

In this section we will compare our data with the results of Depovere (2018) based on a negative review with Peter as the author. Table 12 shows an overview of the means per construct and semantic variable. Scenarios with N refer to the negative reviews.

#### 4.4.1 Constructs

|                                  | Scenario 1 | Scenario N1 | Scenario 2 | Scenario N2 | Scenario 3 | Scenario N3 | Scenario 4 | Scenario N4 |
|----------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 4.49       | 5.26        | 4.34       | 3.43        | 4.34       | 3.37        | 4.43       | 3.28        |
| Text clarity                     | 4.82       | 5.74        | 4.66       | 4.79        | 4.22       | 4.57        | 4.48       | 4.31        |
| Emotion                          | 5.18       | 4.05        | 5.17       | 4.98        | 5.17       | 5.26        | 5.22       | 5.64        |
| Source intelligence              | 3.75       | 4.59        | 3.12       | 2.60        | 2.80       | 3.11        | 2.81       | 2.50        |
| Text quality                     | 4.06       | 5.37        | 2.66       | 1.67        | 1.58       | 1.78        | 1.64       | 1.34        |
| Usefulness                       | 4.56       | 5.35        | 4.24       | 3.68        | 3.93       | 3.45        | 3.90       | 3.45        |
| Consumer intention               | 4.62       | 2.10        | 4.53       | 2.84        | 4.19       | 3.39        | 4.23       | 2.87        |
| WOM intention                    | 2.84       | 1.70        | 2.83       | 2.26        | 2.38       | 2.62        | 2.70       | 2.16        |

*Table 20 Mean values constructs positive and negative scenarios*

Firstly, we notice that Scenario N1 scores higher mean values than Scenario 1 for the constructs text credibility and reliability, text clarity, source intelligence, text quality, and usefulness. There was no clear consensus in the literature regarding the credibility of negative versus positive reviews. While Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) said negative reviews appear more credible, Li and Zahn (2011) suggested the opposite. Our data regarding review credibility could suggest that a negative review without language errors or *tussentaal* is perceived as more credible and reliable than its positive counterpart. Secondly, the negative scenarios with language manipulations obtain generally lower scores than their positive counterparts for these constructs. Thus, in very positive reviews respondents seem to be more forgiving in the sense that credibility – which was not all that high to start with – does not drop as pervasively as it does in the negative scenario. We see the same trend for source intelligence. Therefore, Depovere's (2018) remark that the low perceived source intelligence could be partly due to the extreme negativity is therefore possibly countered by our findings. Moreover, Depovere (2018) noted a similar effect for source intelligence as for text credibility and reliability: the author of the standard Dutch scenario was perceived as more intelligent than the writers of the manipulated reviews. Our data indicates the same negative influence of language errors and *tussentaal* on the perceived source intelligence in a positive review. Thirdly, our data uncovered the same finding as Depovere (2018) considering the effect of language errors and *tussentaal* features on the perceived text quality. Both in negative and positive reviews does non-standard language affect the text quality negatively. Another interesting difference can be found for the construct emotion, which seems to score higher in Scenario 1 compared to Scenario N1. While the mean values for the positive review remain quite similar, and rather high, the negative reviews with language errors appeared more emotional than the standard Dutch negative review. Surprisingly, the mean values for WOM intention are quite similar across all scenarios, both positive and negative. This is not in line with our assumptions because we would expect a larger WOM intention after reading a positive review. Two possible explanations for this were already mentioned in 4.2.1.

#### 4.4.2 Semantic variables

|                 | Scenario 1 | Scenario N1 | Scenario 2 | Scenario N2 | Scenario 3 | Scenario N3 | Scenario 4 | Scenario N4 |
|-----------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Clarity         | 5.71       | 6.08        | 5.58       | 5.15        | 5.12       | 5.57        | 5.44       | 4.66        |
| Well-written    | 4.61       | 5.55        | 3.31       | 2.03        | 2.74       | 2.03        | 2.32       | 1.66        |
| Reliability     | 4.61       | 5.37        | 4.40       | 3.27        | 4.16       | 3.35        | 4.16       | 2.86        |
| Credibility     | 4.61       | 5.47        | 4.50       | 3.42        | 4.42       | 3.43        | 4.68       | 3.17        |
| Conviction      | 5.27       | 5.68        | 4.69       | 4.03        | 4.61       | 3.70        | 4.67       | 3.34        |
| Emotion         | 2.82       | 4.24        | 3.09       | 2.45        | 2.57       | 2.35        | 2.50       | 1.72        |
| Professionality | 3.03       | 4.74        | 2.49       | 1.85        | 1.69       | 1.65        | 1.69       | 1.48        |
| Tone            | 5.60       | 3.97        | 4.94       | 2.15        | 4.18       | 1.70        | 4.41       | 1.62        |
| Friendliness    | 6.26       | 3.89        | 6.01       | 2.27        | 5.35       | 1.62        | 5.62       | 1.66        |
| Respect         | 6.06       | 4.29        | 5.83       | 2.76        | 4.82       | 1.92        | 5.10       | 2.10        |
| Politeness      | 3.92       | 4.43        | 4.51       | 2.55        | 3.88       | 1.84        | 3.96       | 1.83        |
| Impulsiveness   | 2.93       | 4.37        | 2.60       | 2.03        | 1.97       | 1.84        | 2.01       | 1.59        |

Table 21 Mean values semantic variables positive and negative scenarios

The main trend is again better perceptions for Scenario N1 than Scenario 1, except for the semantic variables tone, friendliness and respect. This corroborates our findings for the constructs mentioned above. It is not surprising that the positive review appears more friendly, more respectful and to have a better tone as the review praises the restaurant. In sum, in comparison to their negative counterpart, extremely positive reviews written in standard Dutch are perceived as less clear, of a lesser writing quality, less reliable and credible, less convincing, less professional, less rational and less sensible. It also appears that non-standard language is tolerated more in positive reviews than in negative ones for the abovementioned semantic variables. In other words, when the reviewer is extremely negative they cannot afford to make language errors.

In conclusion, Depovere (2018) found significant differences caused by non-standard language for all nine constructs; while we only registered four affected constructs (source intelligence, text quality, usefulness and consumer intention). This could suggest that negative reviews are judged more severely on their language than positive reviews. Moreover, the vast majority of constructs and semantic variables showed lower mean values for the scenarios with non-standard language than for their positive counterparts. This could again be an indication that in negative scenarios, non-standard language provokes a stronger negative reaction than it would in positive reviews. In other words, reviewers should pay extra attention to their language when complaining via an online review in order to be perceived better. Additionally, we noticed the positive standard Dutch scenario was considered less credible, reliable, useful, clear, convincing, of a lesser writing quality and the reviewer less intelligent and professional in comparison to the negative review. This is in contradiction with our first hypothesis that positive reviews would be perceived better than its negative equivalent. Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) did suggest that negative reviews are considered as more credible but Li and Zahn (2011) indicated extreme positivity would not be harmful. Scenario 1 did score higher mean values for the constructs of emotion, consumer intention, WOM intention, tone, friendliness and respect. This is again no surprise as the negative review entails quite a serious complaint.

#### 4.5 Impact of control variables

We also inserted control variables into our questionnaire and will now discuss their possible impact on the outcomes we suggested in the previous pages. We used a Mann-Whitney U test and set the cut-off point at 0.05. All our respondents are between the ages of eighteen and thirty. We further divided this age group into two subcategories. The first one contains all participants between eighteen and twenty-one years old, the second subcategory are the respondents of twenty-two to thirty years old. Table 22 shows that one semantic variable indicates a significant difference between our two age groups: politeness. The mean value of the younger age group ( $M= 4.22$ ) suggests they perceived the review as more polite than the older age group ( $M= 3.84$ ). In general, however, age did not seem to have influenced our findings. Table 23 shows that the region of our respondents could have affected the outcome of the construct source intelligence and the variable “well-written”. The differences were found between the people from Flemish-Brabant and the Brussels Capital region (for source intelligence) and Brussels Capital region and other (for well-written). However, we cannot consider these results as relevant because only four people of the Brussels capital region filled in our surveys. In other words, region should not have had an impact on our outcomes. Both the constructs emotion and text quality appear to be influenced by our respondents’ academic degree (see Table 24). The first significant difference was found between the respondents with a degree of secondary education (209 people) and the participants with an academic bachelor (71 people). Because the number of respondents with an academic bachelor were rather low per scenario, we should consider this finding with caution. The other significant difference was found between the respondents with a professional bachelor’s degree (59 people) and the people with an academic bachelor’s degree (71 people). Because of the low amount of representatives per group, we cannot consider this a relevant finding. Our respondents who have a language degree seem to find the review less clear than the other participants do. Only 33 people with a language degree fulfilled our surveys and we can therefore not take into account this difference. In conclusion, the control variables exerted little effect on our findings except for the few significant differences mentioned above. We should consider these with caution because of the low number of representatives for each demographic in each scenario.

## Age

| Construct                        | p-value      |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 0.639        |
| Text clarity                     | 0.215        |
| Emotion                          | 0.426        |
| Source intelligence              | 0.060        |
| Positivity                       | 0.035        |
| Text quality                     | 0.627        |
| Usefulness                       | 0.186        |
| Consumer intention               | 0.697        |
| WOM intention                    | 0.488        |
| Semantic variable                | p-value      |
| Clarity                          | 0.361        |
| Well-written                     | 0.172        |
| Reliability                      | 0.314        |
| Credibility                      | 0.889        |
| Conviction                       | 0.528        |
| Emotion                          | 0.272        |
| Professionality                  | 0.620        |
| Tone                             | 0.241        |
| Friendliness                     | 0.950        |
| Respect                          | 0.794        |
| Politeness                       | <b>0.033</b> |
| Impulsiveness                    | 0.253        |

Table 22 Kruskal-Wallis test constructs and semantic variables: age

## Region

| Construct                        | p-value |
|----------------------------------|---------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 0.798   |
| Text clarity                     | 0.619   |
| Emotion                          | 0.500   |

|                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Source intelligence | <b>0.024</b> |
| Positivity          | 0.762        |
| Text quality        | 0.053        |
| Usefulness          | 0.827        |
| Consumer intention  | 0.718        |
| WOM intention       | 0.721        |
| Semantic variable   | p-value      |
| Clarity             | 0.865        |
| Well-written        | <b>0.007</b> |
| Reliability         | 0.626        |
| Credibility         | 0.506        |
| Conviction          | 0.681        |
| Emotion             | 0.064        |
| Professionalism     | 0.333        |
| Tone                | 0.142        |
| Friendliness        | 0.161        |
| Respect             | 0.170        |
| Politeness          | 0.232        |
| Impulsiveness       | 0.285        |

Table 23 Kruskal-Wallis test constructs and semantic variables: region

## Education

| Construct                        | p-value      |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 0.362        |
| Text clarity                     | 0.336        |
| Emotion                          | <b>0.007</b> |
| Source intelligence              | 0.115        |
| Positivity                       | 0.057        |
| Text quality                     | <b>0.026</b> |
| Usefulness                       | 0.198        |
| Consumer intention               | 0.936        |
| WOM intention                    | 0.370        |

| Semantic variable | p-value |
|-------------------|---------|
| Clarity           | 0.773   |
| Well-written      | 0.166   |
| Reliability       | 0.602   |
| Credibility       | 0.205   |
| Conviction        | 0.949   |
| Emotion           | 0.086   |
| Professionality   | 0.081   |
| Tone              | 0.447   |
| Friendliness      | 0.894   |
| Respect           | 0.617   |
| Politeness        | 0.416   |
| Impulsiveness     | 0.179   |

Table 24 Kruskal-Wallis test constructs and semantic variables: education

### Language degree

| Construct                        | p-value      |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Text credibility and reliability | 0.253        |
| Text clarity                     | 0.222        |
| Emotion                          | 0.224        |
| Source intelligence              | 0.469        |
| Positivity                       | 0.482        |
| Text quality                     | 0.915        |
| Usefulness                       | 0.524        |
| Consumer intention               | 0.513        |
| WOM intention                    | 0.214        |
| Semantic variable                | p-value      |
| Clarity                          | <b>0.021</b> |
| Well-written                     | 0.802        |
| Reliability                      | 0.789        |
| Credibility                      | 0.847        |
| Conviction                       | 0.375        |

|                 |       |
|-----------------|-------|
| Emotion         | 0.195 |
| Professionality | 0.573 |
| Tone            | 0.360 |
| Friendliness    | 0.571 |
| Respect         | 0.963 |
| Politeness      | 0.479 |
| Impulsiveness   | 0.054 |

*Table 25 Kruskal-Wallis test constructs and semantic variables: language degree*



## 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This dissertation focussed on the possible impact of non-standard language, gender and positivity on the reader's perceptions on an online review and its author. In this chapter, we will discuss our main findings from the data we collected through online surveys. We will also mention the limitations we faced and offer some suggestions for further research.

### 5.1 Conclusion

#### **The impact of non-standard language**

Non-standard language negatively affected our tested constructs of source intelligence, text quality, usefulness and consumer intention. These results are in agreement with those obtained by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). The first type of language manipulation was language errors. Our data suggests that both source intelligence and text quality decrease when there are language errors in a positive review. This corroborates H2 regarding these two constructs. We also added *tussentaal* manipulations in our study and found support for H3 in relation to source intelligence, text quality and usefulness. All three constructs scored significantly lower on the 7-point Likert scale in comparison to the review without language manipulations. Ten out of the twelve semantic variables we implemented supported these main findings. Specifically, the presence of language errors causes a negative effect on the perceived conviction, tone and written quality of the review and professionalism of the reviewer. *Tussentaal* features cause a decline in the review's perceived clarity, friendliness, respect, rationality, written quality, conviction, and tone and the professionalism of the reviewer. These findings also support H2 and especially H3. Additionally, we found that *tussentaal* had a greater impact on the perceived professionalism, tone, friendliness, respect, politeness and impulsiveness of the review in comparison to language errors. This could be due to the higher density of manipulations in the scenario with *tussentaal* features (0.09% compared to 0.03% for language errors). Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) did not register any stronger impact caused by *tussentaal*. On the contrary, they noted language errors were perceived worse than *tussentaal* regarding clarity and mentioned that *tussentaal* appeared more acceptable to their respondents regarding source intelligence. Because we applied the exact same densities as Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018), this should not have affected this opposite finding. Therefore, this could suggest that the

positivity of our review influenced the tolerance of *tussentaal* and language errors differently than in the study conducted by Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018).

### **The impact of the respondent's gender**

Because the data for our female reviewer "Sofie" is not yet available, we can only discuss the impact of the respondent's gender. We did not find any general differences between our male and female participants regarding the tested constructs and variables. However, we did find evidence that women could possibly have a more moderate opinion of language errors in positive online reviews regarding its perceived positivity, usefulness, reliability and conviction. This is the opposite of the findings of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) who suggested men to be more permissive of language errors. As we do not see a general effect of the respondent's gender on the perception of the review and reviewer, we must partly reject H4. Once our data can be compared to the data Steven Dendoncker, we can make suggestions on the effect of the reviewer's gender as well.

### **The impact of the positivity of the review**

The results of this study did not show any significant increase in the mean values of the constructs or semantic variables of the positive review in comparison to its negative counterpart, except for friendliness, tone, respect, WOM intention and consumer intention. We find it only logical that these affected semantic variables and constructs would be perceived better in a positive review than in a complaint. We also registered a general trend that negative reviews written in standard Dutch are considered better than their positive equivalent. These results corroborate the ideas of Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) who suggested that negative reviews appear more credible. A second general finding is that non-standard language is tolerated more in positive reviews than in negative ones. In conclusion, we must reject H1, as the general perceptions did not enhance due to the positive nature of our review.

## 5.2 Limitations

Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018) indicated the extreme negativity of their review could have influenced the perceptions of the reader, our data partly debunks this theory as our extremely

positive review also obtained quite low values for perceived credibility and reliability, text quality and the reviewer's perceived intelligence. However, it remains unclear if this is again due to the polarity of our review. Earlier research pointed out that extreme positivity is also considered not trustworthy in online reviews (Metzger et al., 2010). Further research should be carried out to establish the effect of non-standard language and gender in a more moderate review.

Furthermore, this research was limited in its amount of respondents. Even though we noticed some promising results regarding the effect of language errors and *tussentaal* on the reader's perceptions, we would advise further research to explore this on a larger scale as well. Moreover, the composition of our population could have had an impact on our findings. Further research should strive to obtain an almost equal amount of female and male respondents with more diverse living areas. Our study failed to obtain a minimum of thirty male participants in two scenarios and 65.8% of our population is from East-Flanders. We also limited our participants' ages to eighteen to thirty, which could also be expanded in further research.

Another limitation we faced involves the gender of the reviewer. First, we opted for the same names as Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). Therefore, it is still unclear whether the names "Sofie" and "Peter" also influence the reader's perceptions. Do our respondents know a Peter or Sofie? Does his or her own name resemble Peter or Sofie? These factors can have an influence on the author's image and credibility. Second, we decided to repeat the name of the reviewer multiple times in the questionnaire to stay true to the methodology of Depovere (2018) and Loete (2018). This could have drawn more attention to the reviewer's gender than the reader would normally pay to this variable when reading a review. Further studies, which consider these variables, will need to be undertaken.



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## APPENDIX I: SURVEY

TripAdvisor (1)

**Beste deelnemer**

In het kader van een onderzoek naar online reviews, krijgt u een review te zien over het Italiaanse restaurant Porto Fino. Over die review krijgt u vervolgens verschillende vragen.

Lees de review eerst aandachtig, voor u de vragen over de review beantwoordt. Indien u bij de vragen over de review zelf niet meteen weet welk antwoord aan te duiden, gelieve dan toch te antwoorden op basis van uw gevoel. Het invullen van de vragenlijst zal slechts 5-10 minuten in beslag nemen.

De enquête wordt anoniem verwerkt; de inleidende vragen dienen enkel om een profiel te schetsen van onze respondenten. De namen van de reviewer en het restaurant werden aangepast.

Hartelijk dank voor uw hulp!

## Persoonlijke gegevens

Gelieve volgende vragen te beantwoorden.

\* 1. Wat is uw geslacht?

Man

Andere

Vrouw

\* 2. Wat is uw leeftijd?

\* 3. In welke provincie woont u?

Antwerpen

Vlaams-Brabant

Limburg

West-Vlaanderen

Oost-Vlaanderen

Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest

Andere:

\* 4. Wat is uw hoogst behaalde diploma?

Geen diploma

Diploma academische bachelor

Diploma lager onderwijs

Diploma master

Diploma secundair onderwijs

Doctoraat

Diploma professionele bachelor

Indien uw hoogstbehaalde diploma een bachelor- of masterdiploma is, welk diploma is dat?

\* 5. Volgt u momenteel nog een opleiding aan een hogeschool of universiteit? Indien ja, welke opleiding?

Nee

Ja:

## Algemene vragen

**Gelieve volgende vragen te beantwoorden.**

\* 6. Leest u online reviews (over producten, restaurants,...)?

- |                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Nooit     | <input type="radio"/> Vaak      |
| <input type="radio"/> Zelden    | <input type="radio"/> Heel vaak |
| <input type="radio"/> Af en toe |                                 |

\* 7. Schrijft u zelf online reviews?

- |                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Nooit     | <input type="radio"/> Vaak      |
| <input type="radio"/> Zelden    | <input type="radio"/> Heel vaak |
| <input type="radio"/> Af en toe |                                 |

\* 8. Schrijft u, bijvoorbeeld na een goede restaurantervaring, een positieve review?

- |                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Nooit     | <input type="radio"/> Vaak      |
| <input type="radio"/> Zelden    | <input type="radio"/> Heel vaak |
| <input type="radio"/> Af en toe |                                 |

\* 9. Bent u vertrouwd met TripAdvisor?

- Ja  
 Nee

\* 10. Gelieve de volgende stellingen te beoordelen op een schaal van 1 (helemaal niet akkoord) tot 7 (helemaal akkoord).

Helemaal niet  
akkoord

Helemaal  
akkoord

Over het algemeen ben ik meer geneigd om positieve feedback te formuleren over goede restaurantervaringen dan de meeste mensen die ik ken.

Ik ben gewoonlijk terughoudend in het formuleren van positieve feedback, ongeacht de kwaliteit van het restaurant.

Vragen over de review

**Gelieve de volgende review aandachtig te lezen en daarna de vragen te beantwoorden.**



**Peter**  
België

●●●●○ 8 oktober 2018 beoordeeld

### Elke cent waard

Vandaag zijn we eindelijk eens gaan eten in Porto Fino. De bediening was heel goed, de pasta met zeevruchten rook heerlijk en het eten was echt lekker. De pizza van mijn partner was gewoonweg fantastisch, we hebben al lang niet meer zo lekker gegeten. En dan de wijn: een halve liter voor twaalf euro en hij was perfect van smaak. Ze waren echt tevreden toen we dat allemaal zeiden en ze hebben gezegd dat het vooral dankzij de chef was. Echt een topteam! Ik zal zeker nog terugkomen en ik maak met veel plezier reclame. Het was elke cent absoluut waard!

Stel een vraag over Porto Fino

*Deze beoordeling is de persoonlijke mening van een TripAdvisor-lid en niet die van TripAdvisor LLC zelf.*

Welke van de volgende kenmerken zou u toeschrijven aan de manier waarop Peter de review schreef. Hoe dichter bij het woord u inkleurt, hoe meer u akkoord gaat.

\* 11. Kenmerk 1

Onduidelijk

Duidelijk

a.

\* 12. Kenmerk 2

Slecht  
geschreven

Goed  
geschreven

a.

\* 13. Kenmerk 3

Onbetrouwbaar Betrouwbaar

a.

\* 14. Kenmerk 4

Ongeloofwaardig Geloofwaardig

a.

\* 15. Kenmerk 5

Niet overtuigend Overtuigend

a.

\* 16. Kenmerk 6

Emotioneel Rationeel

a.

\* 17. Kenmerk 7

Niet professioneel Professioneel

a.

\* 18. Kenmerk 8

Slechte toon Goede toon

a.

\* 19. Kenmerk 9

Onvriendelijk Vriendelijk

a.

\* 20. Kenmerk 10

Respectloos Respectvol

a.

\* 21. Kenmerk 11

Onbeleefd Beleefd

a.

\* 22. Kenmerk 12

|    | Impulsief             |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       | Doordacht             |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. | <input type="radio"/> |

\* 23. Gelieve de volgende stellingen te beoordelen op een schaal van 1 (helemaal niet akkoord) tot 7 (helemaal akkoord).

|  | Helemaal niet akkoord |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       | Helemaal akkoord      |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ik vind deze review waardevol.                                   | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind de argumenten van Peter duidelijk.                       | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind deze review betrouwbaar.                                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik schat de restaurantervaring positief in.                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind dat de schrijver/schrijfster emotioneel overkwam.        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Deze review zou mijn restaurantkeuze in de toekomst mee bepalen. | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik zou geneigd zijn om het advies op te volgen.                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik zou mijn vrienden vertellen over deze review.                 | <input type="radio"/> |
| De review van Peter is geloofwaardig.                            | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik denk dat Peter professioneel succesvol is.                    | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik denk dat Peter de waarheid zegt.                              | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik denk dat Peter vaak reviews schrijft.                         | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik denk dat Peter onderhoudend/entertainend is.                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind dat Peter emotie toont in de review.                     | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik denk dat Peter intelligent is.                                | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik denk dat Peter kennis van zaken heeft.                        | <input type="radio"/> |

|  | Helemaal niet akkoord |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       | Helemaal akkoord      |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ik zou geneigd zijn om een bezoek aan Porto Fino te overwegen.   | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik zou overwegen in dit restaurant te eten.  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Op basis van deze review zou ik vrienden, familie of kennissen Porto Fino aanbevelen.                                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Als vrienden op zoek zijn naar een restaurant, zou ik hen Porto Fino voorstellen.                                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mocht ik op zoek zijn naar een restaurant, zou ik Porto Fino overwegen.  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik zou na het lezen van deze review geneigd zijn om positieve mond-aan-mondreclame te verspreiden over dit restaurant. | <input type="radio"/> |

## Vragen over de taal

Geef de volgende vragen te beantwoorden.

\* 24. Gebruikt u zelf spreektaalige elementen (vb. nie, wa, da) in geschreven online omgevingen?

- Nooit
  Vaak  
 Zelden
  Heel vaak  
 Af en toe

\* 25. Indien u spreektaalige elementen gebruikt, in welke context doet u dat dan?

\* 26. Geef de volgende vragen te beantwoorden op een schaal van 1 (nooit) tot 7 (heel vaak).

|  | Nooit                 |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       | Heel vaak             |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Zou u spreektaalige elementen gebruiken in reviews (vb. nie, wa, da)?  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Verlengt u klinkers of medeklinkers in online omgevingen (vb. okeeee)?   | <input type="radio"/> |
| Gebruikt u soms meerdere leestekens na elkaar (vb. Ja!!)?  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Zet u bij nadruk volledige woorden in hoofdletters in online omgevingen (vb. LEKKER)?  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Zou u de vorige elementen ((mede) klinkers verlengen, leestekens verlengen en volledige woorden in hoofdletters) toepassen in reviews? | <input type="radio"/> |

\* 27. Gelieve de volgende stellingen te beoordelen op een schaal van 1 (helemaal niet akkoord) tot 7 (helemaal akkoord).

|  | Helemaal niet akkoord |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       | Helemaal akkoord      |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ik vind dat de schrijver/schrijfster een verzorgd taalgebruik hanteerde. | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind dat de schrijver/schrijfster Algemeen Nederlands gebruikte.      | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind dat de schrijver/schrijfster spreektaalige elementen gebruikte.  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind het taalgebruik gepast in een online omgeving.                   | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik vind het taalgebruik gepast in online reviews.                        | <input type="radio"/> |

\* 28. Stonden er volgens u taalfouten in de review?

- Ja  
 Nee

\* 29. Weet u nog welke taalfout(en) in de review stond(en)? Indien mogelijk, geef enkele voorbeelden in het tekstvakje.

- Nee  
 Ja:

\* 30. Stonden er volgens u werkwoordfouten in de review?

- Nee  
 Ja:

\* 31. Stonden er volgens u spreektaalige elementen in de review?

Nee

Ja

\* 32. De review werd geschreven door...

Een man

Weet ik niet

Een vrouw

\* 33. Hoe oud schat u de reviewer?

Einde

**Bedankt voor uw medewerking!**